

Optimal monetary policy under menu costs

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Abstract

We analytically characterize optimal monetary policy in a multisector economy with menu costs, and show that it “looks through” sectoral shocks even when they affect inflation. In a baseline parameterization, optimal policy stabilizes nominal wages. This *nominal wage targeting* contrasts with inflation targeting, the optimal policy prescribed by the textbook New Keynesian model in which firms are permitted to adjust their prices only randomly and exogenously. More generally, under menu costs, inflation and output should move inversely: following negative shocks, inflation should be allowed to rise. The key intuition is that, unlike the optimal policy, stabilizing inflation causes shocks to spill over across sectors, needlessly increasing the number of firms that must pay the fixed cost of price adjustment. Finally, we show in a rich quantitative model that moving from inflation to nominal wage targeting reduces the welfare loss from menu costs.

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1 Introduction

Many central banks around the world have adopted some form of inflation targeting over the past three decades. The textbook formulation of the New Keynesian model provides theoretical grounding for such policies: in the Calvo formulation of the New Keynesian model, where firms are only randomly given the opportunity to change prices, optimal policy is strict inflation targeting. This is true in the textbook one-sector New Keynesian model (Woodford 2003) as well as in heterogeneous multisector versions of the model, for an appropriately-defined price index (Rubbo 2023). The Calvo assumption of random price changes upon which these models are built is mathematically convenient, but arguably comes at the cost of realism. A natural but notoriously less tractable alternative is the “menu cost” model in which firms can *choose* to change their prices at any time, but must pay a fixed menu cost to do so.

We analytically and without linearization characterize optimal monetary policy in a multisector economy with menu costs, and we show that optimal policy “looks through” sectoral shocks even when they cause inflation to move. We do so by developing a model in which the economy is made up of sectors, where firms are subject to sector-specific productivity shocks and can change their price at any point by paying a menu cost. In baseline parameterizations, optimal policy is precisely nominal wage targeting: nominal wages should be stabilized, but inflation should not be. This is despite wages themselves being completely flexible. Under more general conditions, inflation and output should move inversely.

Intuition. The intuition for this result is that stabilizing inflation causes shocks to spill over across sectors and therefore leads the economy to incur unnecessary menu costs. Consider for example a positive productivity shock affecting only firms in sector 1. If the shock is sufficiently large, then it is efficient and desirable for firms in sector 1 to cut their *relative* prices, compared to firms in other sectors of the economy. Under a policy of inflation targeting, the overall price level must be unchanged. To simultaneously have the relative price fall *and* the price level be stable requires not only that sector-1 firms cut their nominal prices, but also that firms in all other sectors raise their nominal prices. As a result, *all* sectors are forced to adjust their prices and pay a menu cost.

A natural alternative – which we show to be optimal – is instead to simply allow firms in sector 1 to cut their nominal prices and to ensure that firms in other sectors do not want to adjust their prices. As a result, relative prices are correct, and *only* sector-1 firms must pay a menu cost. Thus optimal policy economizes on wasteful menu costs compared to inflation targeting, while still achieving the efficient allocation. Optimal policy “looks

through” the shock in the sense that *aggregate* inflation is allowed to adjust in response to the sectoral shock, instead of the central bank acting to ensure aggregate inflation is unaffected.

Firms only want to adjust their prices if their *nominal marginal costs* change, and so optimal policy seeks to ensure that nominal marginal costs do not change in unshocked sectors. Thus, in a baseline model where wages and productivity are the only factors affecting marginal cost, optimal policy stabilizes nominal wages, since this ensures marginal costs are unchanged for those firms whose productivities do not change. More generally, optimal policy causes inflation and output to move inversely: the positive productivity shock causes output to rise, and the price decrease in sector 1 causes aggregate inflation to fall. In contrast, inflation targeting would be optimal in the Calvo version of this model, as noted above.¹

Analytical model. We begin in sections 2 and 3 with an off-the-shelf multisector menu cost model and analyze a one-sector shock, as described above, which is the minimum necessary machinery to highlight the core logic described above. The framework is general and can allow “menu costs” to capture a broad conception of the fixed costs of price adjustment, whether they be physical, informational, or behavioral “menu” costs.

We go on to show in sections 4 and 5 that the logic generalizes to several extensions. We characterize optimal policy when shocks affect multiple sectors simultaneously, and show that for a broad class of such shocks, stabilizing the nominal marginal costs of unshocked firms continues to be optimal policy. Next, we extend the model to allow for production networks, and show that the same characterization of optimal policy holds. In the roundabout economy of Basu (1995), there is a particularly simple characterization of optimal policy. In such an economy, stabilizing nominal marginal costs of unshocked firms means stabilizing a weighted average of nominal wages and prices.

Finally, we consider a model variant where *wages* are sticky due to some fixed ‘menu’ cost (e.g. a fixed cost of contract renegotiation), and prices are flexible. Surprisingly, in the standard framework with monopolistic unions, stabilizing nominal wages is optimal and continues to minimize expenditure on wasteful menu costs. This remains true if both wages and prices are sticky, in the baseline parameterization.

Additionally, we use the menu cost model to shed new light on the standard Calvo model: we show that inflation targeting is optimal in the standard Calvo model only for fairly esoteric reasons. Consider within the Calvo model the previously-described

¹Rubbo (2023) shows this in a multisector model with a general input-output structure and the textbook Calvo friction. Woodford (2003), Aoki (2001), Benigno (2004), and show the same in models without the general network structure, as in the environment presented here, again under the Calvo friction. See also Farhi and Werning (2017) for optimal policy results in a multiregion model.

shock raising productivity only in sector 1. Firms in sector 1 want to cut their price as a result. Under Calvo, it is optimal for the central bank to induce every other sector to raise their prices slightly, so that inflation is zero on average.² Because of the Calvo friction, some firms within each sector are exogenously prevented from adjusting their price; this causes within-sector price dispersion. If instead of all sectors adjusting, *only* sector-1 firms adjusted, then the within-sector price dispersion would be *only* in sector 1. Optimal policy instead forces *all* sectors to adjust to the shock only affecting sector 1, causing within-sector price dispersion in *all* sectors, but with the benefit of reducing the severity of price dispersion within sector 1.

In short, the *convexity of the welfare costs of relative price dispersion* under Calvo makes it optimal to smooth dispersion across sectors instead of concentrating it in one sector: optimal policy actively spreads the disequilibrium across sectors. In contrast, menu costs are *nonconvex*, meaning that it is optimal for only the shocked firms to adjust, instead of smoothing adjustments across all firms in the economy. This is because under menu costs shocked firms are able to choose whether or not to adjust prices, preventing arbitrarily-severe within-sector price dispersion – unlike under Calvo. Figure 1 below illustrates this discussion.

We interpret these results as support for the idea that central banks should “look through” sectoral shocks and allow them to affect aggregate inflation (Brainard 2022; Schnabel 2022). For example, instead of tightening monetary policy in response to a negative oil supply shock in order to hold down inflation – e.g. as implemented by the European Central Bank explicitly in 2011 or the Federal Reserve implicitly in 2008 – this menu cost logic would suggest that it is efficient to allow energy prices to adjust without forcing other prices to decrease to compensate.

Quantification. The welfare loss of inflation targeting under menu costs is precisely due to the costs of excess price adjustment, which we quantify in a dynamic version of the model. This model is calibrated to US data and, on top of sectoral shocks, allows for idiosyncratic shocks, which are another major source of price changes.

We compare the performance of inflation and nominal wage targeting and show that nominal wage targeting results in a significant welfare improvement compared to inflation targeting. This result follows from the fact that the empirical literature estimates menu costs to be fairly large. Based on directly-measured costs alone, the existing literature finds that between 0.6% and 1.2% of firm revenue is spent per year on costs related to price adjustment (Levy et al. 1997; Dutta et al. 1999; Zbaracki et al. 2004).³ We also solve

²In a model with symmetry across sectors, “inflation” here refers to the standard price index. In a model with additional heterogeneity, this refers to inflation in the “divine coincidence index” of Rubbo (2023).

³The important measurement work of Levy et al. (1997), Dutta et al. (1999), and Zbaracki et al. (2004) is

for the optimal monetary policy rule that would numerically maximize welfare under the same shocks, and show that it is well-approximated by a policy stabilizing nominal wages. Finally, we find that the increasing importance of sectoral shocks over the past decades in the US has increased the welfare gain of switching to nominal wage targeting. Moving from inflation targeting to nominal wage targeting would reduce the resources wasted on menu costs by 25%.

Position in literature. To our knowledge, we are the first to characterize optimal monetary policy in the face of fixed menu costs when firms have a motive to adjust relative prices. On the one hand, without changes in productivity between firms, there is no motive for relative-price changes and so optimal policy under menu costs is trivially zero inflation: prices never need to move and price stickiness is irrelevant (see e.g. Nakov and Thomas 2014).⁴ On the other hand, several papers allow for relative-price movements under menu costs but take as *given* that the central bank targets inflation, and simulate numerically how the presence of menu costs affects the optimal level of inflation (Blanco 2021, Nakov and Thomas 2014, Wolman 2011).⁵ A larger literature makes assumptions on monetary policy – i.e. does not analyze optimal policy – and asks how the presence of menu costs affects macroeconomic dynamics (among others, Caplin and Spulber 1987; Golosov and Lucas 2007; Gertler and Leahy 2008; Nakamura and Steinsson 2010; Midrigan 2011; Alvarez, Lippi and Paciello 2011; Auclert et al. 2023). That is, these papers conduct a positive analysis, while we conduct a normative analysis. There is also a large empirical literature on menu costs, finding that menu cost models fit the micro data very well.⁶

Our model formalizes and extends the insightful, literary argument made by Selgin (1997) (chapter 2, section 3) that nominal income targeting, or something like it, is optimal in a world with menu costs. Relative to Selgin’s elegant informal discussion, we are able

extensively cited in the menu cost literature. These measurements are, as we emphasize, endogenous to the monetary policy regime.

⁴Other papers that analyze optimal monetary policy in a sectoral setting, i.e. a setting with relative price movements, besides those already cited include the vertical chain model of Huang and Liu (2005), again under the Calvo friction; Kreamer (2022) as well as Erceg and Levin (2006), who study optimal monetary policy in sectoral models with fixed prices and durable goods; and Guerrieri et al. (2021), who study optimal monetary policy in a sectoral model with downward nominal wage rigidity.

⁵Adam and Weber (2023) study optimal monetary policy at steady state under menu cost frictions with deterministic productivity trends – to a first order approximation – which is complementary to our study of optimal policy in response to stochastic productivity shocks. Adam and Weber (2023) explicitly turn off consideration of minimizing resource costs (their Assumption 1), whereas we show that the fully nonlinear optimal policy crucially depends on minimizing the resource cost of menu costs.

⁶Among many others: Alvarez et al. (2019); Nakamura et al. (2018); Cavallo (2018); Cavallo and Rigobon (2016); Klenow and Kryvtsov (2008); Gautier and Le Bihan (2022).

to introduce the role of state dependence, which is natural in the context of menu costs and does affect optimal policy, as well as to formalize and be precise about the argument in the context of a standard macro model. This formalization allows us to connect our results to prior modeling work, to distinguish between nominal wage targeting versus nominal income targeting, and to take the model to the data to quantify the welfare costs of inflation targeting.

The bigger picture. We see our paper as helping unify the literature on optimal monetary policy. In the last decade a number of papers across a variety of classes of models have found that optimal policy should cause inflation to be countercyclical, not constant: the price level P should move inversely with real output Y . However, sticky price models – the workhorse model of modern macro – had conspicuously held out for the optimality of inflation targeting.

First, Koenig (2013) and Sheedy (2014) show in heterogeneous agent models that when financial markets are incomplete and debt is written in nominal, non-state contingent terms, then nominal income targeting is optimal and inflation targeting is suboptimal. That is, $P \times Y$ should be stabilized, and P should move in response to shocks. Werning (2014) notes that if additional heterogeneity is added to the model, then “approximate” nominal income targeting is optimal: P and Y should move inversely but not one-for-one. This also echoes our results.⁷ Second, Angeletos and La’O (2020) show that in a world where agents have incomplete information about the economy, optimal policy should again ensure the price level P and real output Y move inversely, in order to minimize monetary misperceptions.⁸ Third, when wages are sticky due to a Calvo-type friction, optimal monetary policy is to stabilize nominal wages (Erceg, Henderson and Levin 2000), a policy which also results in countercyclical price inflation.

Despite these results in three highly important classes of models – incomplete markets, information frictions, and sticky wages – it may have been easy to set them aside and nonetheless consider inflation targeting as the proper baseline for optimal monetary policy due to its optimality in the workhorse sticky price model (e.g. Woodford 2003).⁹ We hope our paper helps to conceptually integrate these results from across the incomplete market, information friction, sticky wage, and sticky price models. Our results suggest that *countercyclical inflation*, not stable inflation, is a robustly-optimal policy prescription.

⁷These ideas have been developed further in Bullard and DiCecio (2019) and Bullard et al. (2023).

⁸The nominal contracts and incomplete information literatures also were preceded and discussed very clearly by Selgin (1997).

⁹In the textbook sticky price model, countercyclical inflation can be optimal if there is a binding zero lower bound constraint on the nominal interest rate (Eggertsson and Woodford 2003; Werning 2011; Woodford 2012).

Outline. We first illustrate the optimal policy result in sections 2 and 3 in a baseline setting as described above: an off-the-shelf sectoral model, augmented with menu costs, hit by an unanticipated sectoral productivity shock. In section 4, we discuss the welfare loss of inflation targeting and use our setup to shed new light on the conventional New Keynesian model. In section 5, we show that the optimality of nominal wage targeting continues to hold under a number of generalizations. In section 6, we generalize further by building a quantitative model in order to incorporate dynamics and calculate the welfare gains of adopting nominal wage targeting. Section 7 concludes with a discussion regarding practical implementation of nominal wage targeting.

2 Baseline model

Our baseline framework is a two-period model starting at steady state. There are S sectors, each consisting of a continuum of monopolistically competitive intermediate firms which are aggregated into a sectoral good by a competitive sectoral packager. A competitive final goods producer combines the output of each of the S sectors into a final good, sold to the household. The model and the functional forms we use are the same as Golosov and Lucas (2007), except that productivity shocks are sectoral rather than firm-specific and that we analyze optimal monetary policy instead of exogenous monetary shocks. In section 5, we describe the general case.

2.1 Household

The representative household's utility function is given by

$$W = \ln C - N + \ln \left(\frac{M}{P} \right) \quad (1)$$

as a function of consumption C , labor N , and real money holdings $\frac{M}{P}$.¹⁰ The household chooses C , N and M to maximize its utility, subject to its budget constraint:

$$\text{s.t. } PC + M = WN + D + M_{-1} - T$$

¹⁰We follow Woodford (1998) in ignoring the welfare effects of real balances when analyzing optimal monetary policy. Additionally, we need not use a money-in-utility framework – the results generalize to any framework where the central bank controls some nominal variable – but it allows us to depart minimally from existing literature.

To fund expenditures the household uses labor income from wages W , firm dividends D , and previous period money balances M_{-1} , less taxes T . The first order conditions imply:

$$PC = M \quad (2)$$

$$W = M \quad (3)$$

Our particularly simple assumptions on preferences – again matching those of Golosov and Lucas (2007) – result in two simple optimality conditions: an equation of exchange (2) and an equation (3) stating that in equilibrium the nominal wage W is directly determined by the money supply M .

2.2 Final good producer

The representative final good producer aggregates sectoral goods y_i of price p_i across S sectors, using Cobb-Douglas technology, into the final good Y consumed by the household. Operating under perfect competition, its problem is:

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{\{y_i\}_{i=1}^S} \quad & PY - \sum_{i=1}^S p_i y_i \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & Y = \prod_{i=1}^S y_i^{1/S} \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

The resulting demand for sectoral goods is:

$$y_i = \frac{1}{S} \frac{PY}{p_i} \quad (5)$$

The zero profit condition gives the price P for the final good:

$$P = S \prod_{i=1}^S p_i^{1/S} \quad (6)$$

In section 5.1 we discuss how generalizing the Cobb-Douglas functional form used here has no impact on the optimal policy result.

2.3 Sectoral goods producers

In a sector i , a representative sectoral goods producer packages the continuum of intermediate goods, $y_i(j)$, produced within the sector using CES technology. Note that for

notational clarity, we will consistently use j to identify an intermediate firm and i to identify a sector. The problem of the sectoral packager for sector i is:

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{[y_i(j)]_{j=0}^1} \quad & p_i y_i - \int_0^1 p_i(j) y_i(j) dj \\ \text{s.t. } y_i = \quad & \left[\int_0^1 y_i(j)^{\frac{\eta-1}{\eta}} dj \right]^{\frac{\eta}{\eta-1}} \end{aligned} \quad (7)$$

This results in a demand function $y_i(j)$ and a sectoral price index p_i :

$$y_i(j) = y_i \left(\frac{p_i(j)}{p_i} \right)^{-\eta} \quad (8)$$

$$p_i = \left[\int_0^1 p_i(j)^{1-\eta} dj \right]^{\frac{1}{1-\eta}} \quad (9)$$

2.4 Intermediate goods producers

In each sector there is a unit mass of monopolistically competitive firms each producing a different variety of the sectoral good. Their technology is linear, and all firms within a sector i share a common productivity level A_i .¹¹ The linearity of technology significantly simplifies the exposition and is important for generating the optimality of nominal wage targeting in proposition 1; we generalize in section 5.

Intermediate firms are subject to menu costs: if they choose to adjust their price, they must hire an extra ψ units of labor at the wage rate W . This fixed cost of price adjustment, $W\psi$, is what we refer to as a “menu cost”. The menu cost itself is simply a transfer from firm profits to household labor income; the *welfare cost* of menu costs comes from the fact that households must supply extra labor in order for prices to be adjusted, and there is a disutility cost to labor. This is motivated by the idea of firms needing to employ workers for extra hours to physically walk around and update price stickers in a store, but more generally can be thought of as a modeling device to stand in for *any* fixed costs of price adjustment. Modeling menu costs in other ways does not affect the optimal policy conclusions.¹²

¹¹Note that it is standard in the optimal policy literature on sectors and networks to only consider the optimal policy response to *sector-level* productivity shocks: see for example Rubbo (2023), Woodford (2003), Aoki (2001), or Benigno (2004). In particular, these papers do not consider idiosyncratic, firm-level productivity differences. In contrast, in the separate literature on menu costs, it is common to consider such idiosyncratic shocks (Golosov and Lucas 2007). We analyze the case of both sectoral and idiosyncratic shocks using the quantitative model in section 6.

¹²One example of an alternate modeling method is when menu costs burn real resources (as in Alvarez, Lippi and Paciello 2011), and therefore lower the level of profits transferred to households. Another, more

Firm j in sector i thus maximizes profits, including the menu cost if choosing to adjust its price, subject to its demand curve and its production technology, taking as given the inherited price from the previous period $p_i^{\text{old}}(j)$:

$$\begin{aligned}
& \max_{p_i(j)} p_i(j)y_i(j) - Wn_i(j)(1 - \tau) - W\psi\chi_i(j) \\
& \text{s.t. } \chi_i(j) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } p_i(j) \neq p_i^{\text{old}}(j) \\ 0 & \text{else} \end{cases} \\
& y_i(j) = y_i \left(\frac{p_i(j)}{p_i} \right)^{-\eta} \\
& y_i(j) = A_i n_i(j)
\end{aligned} \tag{10}$$

The objective function defines firm profits $D_i(j)$. The variable $\chi_i(j) \in \{0, 1\}$ is a dummy indicating whether or not the firm chooses to adjust its price, $p_i(j)$. If it does, it incurs the menu cost $W\psi$. Otherwise, the price is forced to remain at the inherited level from the previous period, denoted $p_i^{\text{old}}(j)$. The term τ in the firm's problem is the standard labor subsidy provided by the fiscal authority to undo the markup distortion from monopolistic competition, $\tau = \frac{1}{\eta}$, for each unit of labor used in production, $n_i(j)$.

If the firm chooses to pay the menu cost and adjust its price, then – from the firm's first order condition – the optimal reset price equals the nominal marginal cost:

$$p_i(j) = \frac{W}{A_i} \tag{11}$$

Notice that, because productivity is sector-specific, all firms j within a sector i face the same decision problem, and thus all make the same decision on whether to adjust and choose the same reset price. Because of this equivalence, we will often refer interchangeably to firm-specific versus sector-specific prices and quantities, e.g. $p_i(j)$ versus p_i and $n_i(j)$ versus n_i .¹³

behavioral, modeling method would be to model menu costs as directly inflicting a utility penalty on households, as in Auclert, Rognlie and Straub (2018) and as could be motivated by the literature on fairness in pricing (e.g. Eyster, Madarász and Michaillat 2021). It is straightforward to show that optimal policy is the same if menu costs are modeled in either of these ways. This is because the core intuition remains unchanged: optimal policy still seeks to stabilize the desired price of unshocked firms in order to minimize menu costs.

¹³Where sectoral labor is defined naturally as $n_i \equiv \int_0^1 n_i(j) dj$.

2.5 The intermediate firm's adjustment decision

We now turn to the question of whether a given intermediate firm will pay the menu cost to adjust its price. The firm makes its decision to adjust by comparing profits under the new optimal price $\frac{W}{A_i}$ net of the menu cost $W\psi$, versus profits under the inherited price p_i^{old} without the loss from menu costs. Plugging in the respective prices as well as constraints into the profit function and comparing, we arrive at the price-adjustment condition: firm j in sector i will adjust if and only if

$$\left(\frac{W}{A_i}\right)^{1-\eta} p_i^\eta y_i \left[\frac{1}{\eta}\right] - W\psi > \left(p_i^{\text{old}}(j)\right)^{1-\eta} p_i^\eta y_i \left[1 - \frac{W/A_i}{p_i^{\text{old}}(j)} \cdot \frac{\eta - 1}{\eta}\right] \quad (12)$$

This nonlinear adjustment condition implies an inaction region Λ , a standard result in menu cost models. The following lemma describes the inaction region.

Lemma 1 (Inaction region). There exists an inaction region Λ in (W, A_i) space such that a firm in sector i will not adjust its price if and only if the value of (W, A_i) remains within this inaction region:

$$(W, A_i) \in \Lambda \quad (13)$$

The larger is menu cost ψ , the larger is this inaction region. The locus of points that result in the new optimal price equaling the inherited price, $\{(W, A_i) | \frac{W}{A_i} = p_i^{\text{old}}\}$, always lies within the inaction region. The inaction region is a connected set.

Proof: See Appendix A.1. □

To interpret this, note that the desired reset price W/A_i depends on two factors:

1. The sectoral productivity A_i , which is exogenous.
2. The level of nominal wages W , which we saw from (3) is completely determined by the central bank, $W = M$, in equilibrium.

Thus, firms are more likely to adjust after either a large productivity shock or a large monetary action, all else equal.

2.6 Market clearing

Labor market clearing implies that total labor supplied by the household, N , equals labor demanded in production, $\sum_i n_i$, plus the amount of labor required to adjust prices,

which is $\psi \sum_i \chi_i$:

$$N = \sum_{i=1}^S n_i + \psi \sum_{i=1}^S \chi_i \quad (14)$$

This market clearing condition is key to the welfare costs of menu costs. Since labor supply N enters the household utility function negatively, then, larger menu costs ψ requiring the household to work more to adjust prices will lower household welfare.

The rest of market clearing is standard. Denote aggregate productivity as:

$$A \equiv \frac{1}{S} \prod_{i=1}^S A_i^{1/S} \quad (15)$$

The government budget constraint is: $T + (M - M_{-1}) = \tau W \sum_{i=1}^S n_i$. Finally, the aggregate resource constraint implies that consumption equals aggregate output:

$$C = Y \quad (16)$$

2.7 Steady state

The economy begins in a symmetric, flexible-price steady state (steady state variables are denoted with a superscript ss) in which sectoral productivities A_i^{ss} for $i \in \{1, \dots, S\}$ are taken as given and nominal wages are normalized to $W^{ss} = 1$. Without loss of generality, we can set $A_i^{ss} = 1$ for all i , so that $A^{ss} = 1/S$.

The money supply from (3) is then $M^{ss} = 1$. Firms set prices at their flexible levels (11), $p_i^{ss} = 1$. The aggregate price level (6) is $P^{ss} = S$. From money demand (2), consumption and therefore output are equal to aggregate productivity, $C^{ss} = Y^{ss} = M^{ss}/P^{ss} = 1/S$. From demand equations (8) and (5), sectoral output is $y_i^{ss} = \frac{1}{S}$. From intermediate production technology (10) we recover labor in sector i as $n_i^{ss} = \frac{1}{S}$ and aggregate labor from market clearing (14) as $N^{ss} = 1$.

3 Optimal policy after a productivity shock

As our baseline exercise, we consider the optimal response to an unexpected shock to sector 1 alone. For concreteness, consider a positive productivity shock, which we denote as $\gamma > A_1^{ss} = 1$. How should monetary policy optimally set the money supply M ?

Because in the initial steady state all sectors have the same productivity normalized to one, firms in all unshocked sectors $i > 1$ face precisely the same problem after the shock

to sector 1 and make the same decision on whether and how to adjust. As a result, for our purposes in this section there are effectively two sectors of different sizes, sector 1 (with productivity $A_1 = \gamma > 1$ and size 1) and sectors k (with productivity $A_k = 1$ and size $S - 1$). Section 5.3 discusses how this generalizes to shocking multiple sectors. We will consistently identify variables for these unshocked sectors with a k . The relative price between the shocked and unshocked sectors, p_1/p_k , will be a key object of analysis.

Proposition 1, which is a core result, characterizes optimal monetary policy in response to this shock.

Proposition 1 (Optimal monetary policy). For a fixed level of menu costs ψ , there exists a threshold level of productivity $\bar{\gamma} > 1$, such that:

1. If the productivity shock to sector 1 is above the threshold, $\gamma \geq \bar{\gamma}$, then optimal policy is exactly nominal wage targeting: monetary policy should ensure $W = W^{ss}$. This results in firms in sector 1 adjusting their price, while firms in other sectors k leave prices unchanged. This is implemented by leaving the money supply unchanged, $M = M^{ss}$.
2. If the shock is below the threshold, $\gamma \in [1, \bar{\gamma})$, then optimal policy is to ensure that prices remain unchanged and no firm in any sector adjusts.

Additionally, the productivity threshold $\bar{\gamma}$ is increasing in the size of menu costs ψ .

Proof: Lemma 2 and lemma 3 below directly imply the proposition. □

First, we review the economic intuition, which was previewed in the introduction, before proving the proposition. For a sufficiently large productivity shock $\gamma \geq \bar{\gamma}$, it is efficient for the relative price of sector 1, p_1/p_k , to update. To achieve this while simultaneously minimizing the number of sectors which must incur a wasteful menu cost, it is only necessary that firms in sector 1 update their price p_1 – firms in other sectors do not need to update p_k . To ensure that firms in other sectors have no desire to update, the central bank wants to stabilize the level of nominal wages, W , so that the nominal marginal cost of firms in these other sectors is unchanged and these firms have no motive to adjust their prices. On the other hand, for a small productivity shock $\gamma < \bar{\gamma}$, the benefit of updating the relative price p_1/p_k does not outweigh the welfare loss from the menu cost necessary to do so; and it is therefore optimal to ensure that prices remain unchanged across all sectors.

We next step through the math behind this intuition in more detail. We build up to lemma 2 and lemma 3, which together prove proposition 1.

3.1 Allocations in four possible regimes

In this subsection, we characterize four possibilities for equilibrium that monetary policy can implement. In the next subsection, we will compare welfare across them.

Because there are two types of firms (those in sector 1 hit with productivity shock γ , and those in other sectors k with unchanged productivity) and each type has a binary choice (adjusting or not adjusting its price), there are 2×2 possibilities for what may occur in equilibrium:

1. Both sector 1 and sectors k adjust prices
2. Only sector 1 adjusts its price; sectors k do not adjust
3. Only sectors k adjust their prices; sector 1 does not adjust
4. Neither sector 1 nor sectors k adjust price

Furthermore, the central bank helps to determine which of these regimes occurs in equilibrium. This is because a firm in some sector i decides to adjust if its target price, $\frac{W}{A_i}$, is outside its inaction region (13). Since the central bank can move nominal wages W by its choice of money supply M , the central bank helps to determine whether a firm is pushed outside its inaction region or not. (Note that there is always a unique equilibrium for a given choice of M – this is not a choice of *equilibrium* selection, but a choice by monetary policy of how much to increase aggregate demand.)

The optimal policy problem thus consists of:

1. Considering each of these regimes individually, and choosing M to maximize welfare *conditional* on the given regime;
2. Then, choosing the regime among the four which has the highest welfare, and implementing the associated optimal M .

This optimal policy problem, formalized in (49) in appendix A.2, is necessarily piecewise due to the sharp discontinuities created by the discontinuous pricing rules of (13), themselves the result of the fixed menu costs.

We now consider each of these four regimes individually, after discussing a benchmark of flexible prices. The ensuing subsection compares across the four.

Flexible price benchmark. As a benchmark, first consider the flexible price allocation, where the menu cost $\psi = 0$. Nominal wages are determined by the money supply, $W = M$, so that from (11) the flexibly-adjusted prices are $p_1 = \frac{M}{\gamma}$ and $p_k = M$. Observe that

under flexibility, the relative price across types $\frac{p_1}{p_k}$ is:

$$\left(\frac{p_1}{p_k}\right)_{\text{flex}} = \frac{1}{\gamma}$$

This is an important object. This flexible relative price results in aggregate output and consumption equal to $Y = C = \frac{\gamma^{1/S}}{S}$. Total labor, as in steady state, is $N = 1$. Plugging these quantities into the household utility function (1), we have a flexible-price benchmark for welfare of:

$$W_{\text{flex}} = \ln\left(\frac{\gamma^{1/S}}{S}\right) - 1 \quad (17)$$

The flexible-price level of welfare is the first-best, efficient benchmark to which policy should be compared.

All sectors adjust. Next, return to the world where there are nonzero menu costs, and consider the case where all sectors pay the menu cost to adjust. Because all firms adjust to the flexible levels of $p_1 = \frac{M}{\gamma}$ and $p_k = M$, the relative price achieves the flexible price level:

$$\left(\frac{p_1}{p_k}\right)_{\text{all adjust}} = \frac{1}{\gamma} = \left(\frac{p_1}{p_k}\right)_{\text{flex}}$$

However, despite prices flexibly adjusting, the equilibrium differs from the flexible-price equilibrium because additional labor is required to pay the menu costs of price adjustment. This is where the assumptions on preferences plays a useful simplifying role: the fact that the Golosov-Lucas preferences are quasilinear in labor ensure that all income effects affect labor supply. As a result, the additional labor required for menu costs has no effect on equilibrium *except* to increase the amount of labor used.¹⁴ That is, prices and quantities are the same as the flexible price equilibrium, *except* for the additional labor which must be hired to pay for the menu costs: $N = 1 + S\psi$, where $S\psi$ reflects that there are S sectors which must hire ψ units of labor each to adjust price.

¹⁴Without preferences ensuring no income effects on consumption, optimal policy would need to account for the fact that the labor required for menu costs affects the marginal rate of substitution between consumption and leisure. Under optimal policy, production would therefore be slightly tilted away from the flexible-price level. An alternative approach would be to model menu costs as a utility penalty affecting the household directly (c.f. Auclert, Rognlie and Straub 2018 among others), in which case the flexible-price allocation is replicated exactly; we model this in appendix B. In general, as long as the income effects of menu costs are quantitatively small, then preferences which are quasilinear in labor are a good benchmark.

All together, this means that – conditional on all sectors adjusting – welfare is independent of monetary policy because all prices flexibly adjust, and it is equal to the flexible-price level minus the S sectors' worth of menu costs:

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{W}_{\text{all adjust}} &= \ln \left(\frac{\gamma^{1/S}}{S} \right) - [1 + S\psi] \\ &= \mathbb{W}_{\text{flex}} - S\psi\end{aligned}\tag{18}$$

Only sector 1 adjusts. Next consider if only sector 1 updates to $p_1 = \frac{M}{\gamma}$ and sectors k leave their prices unchanged at the steady state level of $p_k = 1$. This results in aggregate output of $Y = \frac{\gamma^{1/S}}{S} M^{\frac{S-1}{S}}$. The total level of labor is $N = \left[\frac{1}{S} + (S-1)\frac{M}{S} \right] + \psi$, reflecting one sector's worth of menu costs ψ , since only sector 1 is adjusting. Thus, household welfare is a function of the money supply decision:

$$\mathbb{W}_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}(M) = \ln \left(\frac{\gamma^{\frac{1}{S}}}{S} M^{\frac{S-1}{S}} \right) - \left[\frac{1}{S} + (S-1)\frac{M}{S} + \psi \right]$$

Conditional on being in this regime, optimal monetary policy chooses M to maximize this expression, which can be found from the first order condition to be:

$$M_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^* = 1$$

where asterisks denote objects under optimal policy.¹⁵ The optimal money supply in this case is left unchanged at the steady state level, $M^{ss} = 1$. Importantly, this ensures that the relative price across sectors, $\frac{p_1}{p_k} = \frac{M}{\gamma}$, equals the flex-price level:

$$\left(\frac{p_1}{p_k} \right)_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^* = \frac{1}{\gamma} = \left(\frac{p_1}{p_k} \right)_{\text{flex}}$$

Why does this policy result in the efficient relative price? Setting $M = 1$ ensures nominal wages are $W = 1$, since $M = W$ from (3), which means that nominal wages are unchanged from steady state $W^{ss} = 1$. As a result, *even though* firms in sectors k leave their prices unchanged at $p_k^{ss} = 1$, if they *were* to adjust to the flex-price level of $\frac{W}{A_k} = W$, they would leave their prices unchanged.

Thus, optimal monetary policy is able to replicate the flexible-price allocation by ensuring that all prices are at the correct level despite sectors k not adjusting, aside from the

¹⁵In subsection 3.3, we discuss the incentive compatibility of this choice of money supply: i.e. if this choice of M ensures only sector 1 wants to adjust.

extra labor required for menu costs. As a result, welfare under optimal policy is equal to the flexible-price level, minus one sector's worth of menu costs from sector 1 adjusting:

$$\begin{aligned} W_{\text{only 1 adjust}}^* &= \ln \left(\frac{\gamma^{1/S}}{S} \right) - [1 + \psi] \\ &= W_{\text{flex}} - \psi \end{aligned} \quad (19)$$

Only sectors k adjust. If only sectors $k = 2, \dots, S$ adjust, the logic is similar to the prior case, except equilibrium has sectors k adjusting, of which there are $S - 1$ in number, instead of only one sector adjusting. The flexible-price allocation is again achievable aside from the extra labor required to pay for menu costs, this time by ensuring that the desired price in sector 1 equals the inherited price. The optimized level of welfare is thus the flexible-price level minus $S - 1$ sectors' worth of menu costs:

$$W_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^* = W_{\text{flex}} - (S - 1)\psi \quad (20)$$

No sector adjusts. Finally consider the possibility that no firm in any sector adjusts. Sectoral prices are thus unchanged from steady state, $p_i = p_i^{ss} = 1 \ \forall i$, and consequently so is the aggregate price level, $P = P^{ss} = S$. Within this regime, this is as if all prices were fully rigid: aggregate output is determined by monetary policy, $Y = C = \frac{M}{S}$. Total labor is $N = \frac{1}{\gamma} \frac{M}{S} + (S - 1) \frac{M}{S}$, noting no labor is required for menu costs because no prices are adjusted. Household welfare as a function of the chosen level of the money supply M is:

$$W_{\text{none adjust}}(M) = \ln \left(\frac{M}{S} \right) - \left[\frac{1}{\gamma} \frac{M}{S} + (S - 1) \frac{M}{S} \right]$$

Conditional on being in this regime, optimal monetary policy chooses M to maximize this expression, which can be found from the first order condition to be $M_{\text{none adjust}}^* = \left[\frac{1}{\gamma} \frac{1}{S} + \frac{S-1}{S} \right]^{-1}$. Under this, the optimized level of welfare is:

$$W_{\text{none adjust}}^* = -\ln \left(S - 1 + \frac{1}{\gamma} \right) - 1 \quad (21)$$

To understand this, note that the relative price $\frac{p_1}{p_k}$ is stuck at the steady state level of 1 instead of being updated to the flexible price level of $\frac{1}{\gamma}$:

$$\left(\frac{p_1}{p_k} \right)_{\text{none adjust}} = 1 \neq \left(\frac{p_1}{p_k} \right)_{\text{flex}}$$

It is because this relative price is stuck at a distorted level that monetary policy is unable to achieve the flexible-price allocation for output and production labor – in contrast to the prior two cases, where by setting this relative price at the flexible level, the central bank could do so.

3.2 Comparing across regimes

In this subsection, we compare welfare across the four possible regimes just derived. We can immediately observe that only two of the four are worth considering for optimal policy.

Lemma 2 (If adjusting, only the shocked sector should adjust). Welfare when only sector 1 adjusts, $W_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^*$, is always strictly higher than welfare when all sectors adjust, $W_{\text{all adjust}}^*$, or when only sectors k adjust, $W_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^*$.

Proof: This follows immediately from comparing (19) with (18) and (20). \square

Lemma 2 follows from the idea that it is better to have fewer firms incur menu costs, together with the fact that optimal policy can implement the efficient relative price $\left(\frac{p_1}{p_k}\right)_{\text{flex}}$ by having *either* sector 1 only adjust, *or* sectors k only adjust, *or* all sectors adjust. Thus, if any firms at all are going to adjust, it is best to have sector-1 firms only adjust.

What remains is to compare welfare if “only sector 1 adjusts” versus if “none adjust”. The next lemma compares these two.

Lemma 3 (Only adjust prices beyond a threshold). There is a threshold $\bar{\gamma}$ such that $W_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^*$ dominates $W_{\text{none adjust}}^*$ if and only if the productivity shock exceeds the threshold, $\gamma \geq \bar{\gamma}$. Furthermore, the threshold $\bar{\gamma}$ is increasing in the menu cost ψ .

Proof: Define $f(\gamma) \equiv W_{\text{none adjust}}^* - W_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^*$. Observe that if $\gamma = 1$, then $f(\gamma) = \psi > 0$. Additionally, as $\gamma \rightarrow \infty$, then $f(\gamma) \rightarrow -\infty$. Finally, f is strictly monotonically decreasing in γ , with $f'(\gamma) = \frac{1}{\gamma} \left[\frac{1}{\gamma(s-1)+1} - \frac{1}{s} \right] < 0$. Since f is continuous in γ , by the intermediate value theorem there exists a $\bar{\gamma} > 1$ such that $f(\bar{\gamma}) = 0$. To see that $\bar{\gamma}$ is increasing in ψ , observe that increasing ψ shifts the entire $f(\gamma)$ curve up, i.e. $\frac{\partial f}{\partial \psi} > 0$. \square

Lemma 3 says that there is an important threshold level $\bar{\gamma}$ for the productivity shock. Below this threshold, household welfare is maximized by ensuring that no firm in any sector adjust; above this threshold, it is maximized by ensuring that sector-1 firms adjust. The intuition for this, as emphasized, is that the welfare loss from menu costs is fixed in size. For a sufficiently small improvement in productivity, the benefit to adjusting prices

does not outweigh the fixed welfare loss from the menu cost that is required to adjust. It is only worthwhile to pay this fixed cost above the threshold. The proof follows this same logic.

Additionally, the productivity threshold $\bar{\gamma}$ is increasing in the size of the menu cost ψ . The intuition for this is that for a larger menu cost, the productivity shock must be bigger for it to be worthwhile to adjust.

In the case where none adjust, the level of nominal wages is $W_{\text{none adjust}} = M_{\text{none adjust}}^* = \left[\frac{1}{\gamma} \frac{1}{S} + \frac{S-1}{S} \right]^{-1}$. Observe that for $\gamma = 1$, then nominal wages are exactly unchanged from the steady state level of $W^{\text{ss}} = 1$. For small shocks, $1 < \gamma < \bar{\gamma}$, nominal wages are also approximately unchanged. In the quantitative model of section 6, we discuss how close this approximation is.

Denote welfare under optimal policy as \mathbb{W}^* , where lemma 2 and lemma 3 together imply $\mathbb{W}^* = \max \left\{ \mathbb{W}_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^*, \mathbb{W}_{\text{neither adjust}}^* \right\}$. Lemma 2 and lemma 3 together also prove proposition 1.

3.3 Adjustment externalities

When discussing the regime where only sector 1 adjusts, we derived equilibrium household welfare as a function of the money supply choice, $\mathbb{W}_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}(M)$, by *assuming* that only firms in sector 1 adjusted prices. We then found the optimal $M_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^*$ by simply taking the first order condition of this function.

More precisely, however, a central bank would choose the money supply M that maximizes welfare $\mathbb{W}_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}(M)$ *subject to the implementability constraint* that such a choice of M *induces* sector 1 to adjust and other sectors k not to adjust. We term this as “constrained” optimal. The choice of M would need to be incentive-compatible with the assumption on who is adjusting price. The same is true for the case where none adjust: the choice of optimal M must not push any firm outside its inaction region. (The same is true of the case where only sectors k adjust, though this is less important because of lemma 2.) These constraints can be written formally as in equations (42)-(44) in appendix A.2.

In proposition 1 and throughout the body of this paper, we have endowed the social planner with the power to force firms to adjust prices – or equivalently, to subsidize price adjustment – so that these implementability constraints are always nonbinding. This is written out explicitly in (46)-(48) in appendix A.2. In appendix B, however, we show that if the planner does not have this instrument, then it is possible for these implementability constraints to bind.

We term the case where the unconstrained-optimal choice of M is not feasible as “ad-

justment externalities”, and discuss these in detail in appendix B. It may be the case that it is socially optimal for firms in sector 1 to adjust their prices, but it may not be privately optimal to do so: prices are “too sticky”, and there is a positive externality to price adjustment. It is also possible, however, that it is socially optimal for firms in either sector 1 *or* in sectors k to leave their price unchanged, but it is privately optimal to do so: prices are “too flexible”, and there is a negative externality to price adjustment. The nature of the externality depends on the size of the shock and the size of menu costs, as detailed in appendix B.

This issue does not arise in the Calvo literature since there is no *choice* of whether or not to adjust – if given the chance to freely adjust under Calvo, a firm will always do so – and therefore these adjustment externalities do not arise. As a result, there is limited precedent in the literature, with a handful of important exceptions. Ball and Romer (1989a) find that menu costs create negative externalities after a *monetary policy shock*. Our setting instead studies whether *efficient* (productivity) shocks create externalities, when monetary policy is set optimally, and finds the possibility of not just negative externalities but also the possibility of positive adjustment externalities. Other related studies include Ball (1987) on negative externalities in the length of labor contracts; Ball and Romer (1989b) on externalities in the timing of staggered price setting; and Ball and Romer (1991) on the possibility of menu cost-induced multiple equilibria. All of these papers study economies where monetary policy is not set optimally; our results show that, *even* when monetary policy is set optimally, adjustment externalities may arise.

Finally, Angeletos and La’O (2020) study optimal monetary policy under information frictions, and in the case of endogenous information acquisition studied in their online appendix A, they find that there are no externalities to information acquisition in price-setting if technology is specified as Dixit-Stiglitz as long as monetary policy is set optimally.¹⁶ In our setting with optimal policy under menu costs, rather than information frictions, we show the possibility of externalities even under the Dixit-Stiglitz specification.

In appendix B, in a variant of the baseline model presented above, we derive a maximum level for menu costs $\bar{\psi}$ such that as long menu costs are below this threshold, $\psi < \bar{\psi}$, then adjustment externalities cannot occur in the exercise above. We show that this maximum level of menu costs for any configuration of parameters is an order of magnitude larger than empirical estimates of menu costs in the literature: menu costs would need to be on the order of 50% of profits to induce adjustment externalities. Thus, for the pur-

¹⁶Caplin and Leahy (2010) speculate informally about such a phenomenon, terming it an “informational externality”; see also Caplin and Leahy (1994).

poses of proposition 1 and for our other analytical results, we have endowed the planner with the choice to overcome adjustment externalities by selectively subsidizing price adjustment.

3.4 Discussion: “Menu costs” in the model can be interpreted broadly

The term “menu costs” originates with the *physical* resource costs of updating posted prices: restaurants needing to print new menus, or retailers needing to pay workers to replace price stickers on their shelves. These physical resource costs are sizeable and underappreciated; we review the literature in section 4.2, where direct measurement shows these to be between 0.6% and 1.2% of firm revenues in key industries of the economy.

However, menu costs can be conceptualized more broadly than simply physical resource costs, both in reality and through the lens of our model. Consider four possible sources of menu costs:

1. **Physical adjustment costs.** This is the baseline interpretation of our model and proposition 1. For example, retail firms needing to pay to print new price stickers and employ workers in updating these stickers on store shelves.
2. **Information costs.** “Menu costs” may represent fixed costs of *information acquisition* or *information processing*. Suppose firm managers must invest time and attention to the state of the economy before updating prices. These costs operate through the same mechanism as in the model above: these costs require more labor. Optimal policy in this environment is unchanged: monetary policy should minimize unnecessary price adjustments, to reduce resources expended on information acquisition.
3. **Behavioral costs.** “Menu costs” could, alternatively, be interpreted more behaviorally: perhaps consumers have an intrinsic *preference* for stable prices, and changing prices has a direct psychological cost on consumers. In appendix B, we model menu costs as directly impinging on household welfare. Optimal policy is unchanged, since the core intuition of proposition 1 carries through: monetary policy should minimize unnecessary price adjustments, to reduce psychological costs caused by price adjustment.¹⁷

¹⁷If these psychological costs are asymmetric and consumers only react negatively to price increases, then optimal policy would be altered. In response to a positive productivity shock, nominal wage targeting would remain optimal. In response to a negative productivity shock, optimal policy would stabilize the nominal marginal costs of the adversely affected sectors.

It is not clear whether consumers have an asymmetric distaste for price increases. Anderson and Simester (2010) conduct a field experiment with a publisher and find that customers are significantly antagonized by price *decreases*.

4. **Zero-sum backlash.** Optimal policy would be altered if “menu costs” are zero sum. Suppose “menu costs” in the firm’s problem simply represent a behavioral *backlash* by consumers to changes in prices: in response to a change in prices, consumers shift their purchases from one firm to another. In this case, there need not be *aggregate* consequences of “menu costs”, since one firm’s loss may be an other’s gain. Note that taking this seriously as the only reason for menu costs would entail strong and unlikely conclusions: optimal policy would be to hyperinflate every period, to ensure that firms are induced to adjust, so that relative prices are always correct – without any cost.

The general principle is that any fixed cost of price adjustment which is not zero sum operates through the same logic as proposition 1. In reality, “menu costs” likely are a combination of both zero-sum and non-zero-sum costs. To the extent that menu costs at all have a non-zero-sum component, the logic of proposition 1 goes through.

4 The welfare loss of inflation targeting & comparison with the NK model

In this section, we contrast our optimal policy results under menu costs to those of the canonical sticky price New Keynesian model, where prices are sticky exogenously due to the Calvo assumption.¹⁸

1. We first discuss how stabilizing inflation under menu costs generates a welfare loss, in contrast to the standard Calvo model where stabilizing inflation is optimal. This is also directly policy-relevant, because leading central banks today describe their policy goals in terms of inflation targeting. This welfare loss is determined by the size of menu costs.
2. Second, we review the direct estimates available in the empirical literature on the size of *physical* menu costs. They are large: at least 0.5% of firm revenue and plausibly much more.
3. Third, we contrast optimal policy in our setting of *nonconvex* menu costs with optimal policy in a model of quadratic *convex* menu costs (Rotemberg 1982). In the convex setting, inflation targeting is optimal, like the Calvo model.

¹⁸Throughout the paper, we refer to “Calvo” sticky pricing, for the sake of space and following the vast majority of the literature. A fuller accounting would refer to the “Calvo-Yun assumption”, in reference to the important work of Yun (1996).

4. Finally, we use the preceding discussion to explain why the standard Calvo model prescribes inflation targeting and not nominal wage targeting, in contrast to the model we present here, shedding new light on the canonical model.

4.1 The welfare loss of inflation targeting under menu costs

The standard New Keynesian model of sticky prices, built on the Calvo exogenous sticky pricing framework, implies that a policy of zero inflation is optimal policy; but in our menu cost setting, such inflation targeting would be strictly suboptimal. This subsection shows a simple result characterizing, quantitatively, how suboptimal inflation targeting is.

In order to implement inflation targeting – i.e. in order to ensure that the price level is unchanged with $P = P^{ss} = 1$ – the central bank has two possibilities:

1. “All adjust”: It may force all firms to adjust, and set M to ensure that the increase in price in sectors k to $p_k = M$ exactly offsets the fall in price in sector 1 to $p_1 = M/\gamma$.
2. “None adjust”: It may ensure that no firm in any sector adjusts.

Although per proposition 1 it is optimal to ensure no sector adjusts in the case of small productivity shocks, $\gamma < \bar{\gamma}$, it would be unusual to conceptualize a policy of inflation targeting as aiming for a world in which relative prices *never* change. If maintained indefinitely, such a policy of aiming to prevent all relative price changes would seem to be self-evidently unreasonable, since it would shut down the price system. Thus it is more natural to characterize “inflation targeting” in this context as referring to the policy that would ensure all firms adjust.

Thus, inflation targeting requires all firms to adjust – but we saw above that forcing all sectors to adjust prices results in unnecessary menu costs. Thus, the welfare loss of inflation targeting relative to optimal policy is directly captured by the welfare loss caused by the unnecessary menu costs paid by the $S - 1$ unshocked sectors. The empirical size of menu costs ψ together with the number of unshocked sectors $S - 1$ are sufficient statistics for the welfare gains that would come from moving from inflation targeting to nominal wage targeting.

The next proposition summarizes this discussion.

Proposition 2 (The welfare loss of inflation targeting). Denote a policy of “inflation targeting” as a rule for monetary policy ensuring that $P = P^{ss}$ while having correct relative prices, and suppose $\gamma \geq \bar{\gamma}$. Then:

1. Inflation targeting requires that all sectors adjust their prices. It is implemented by increasing the money supply to $M = \gamma^{1/S} > M^{ss}$.

2. Welfare under inflation targeting, denoted W^{IT} , is strictly less than welfare under the optimal policy described in proposition 1, W^* . The welfare loss is determined by size of menu costs ψ and the number of sectors unaffected by the shock, $S - 1$:

$$W^{IT} - W^* = (S - 1)\psi$$

Proof: The second claim comes from formulas (18) and (19). For the first claim, suppose the central bank tried to both achieve correct relative prices by only having sector 1 adjust – in which case, $P = SM^{1/S}\gamma^{-1/S}$ – and simultaneously setting M such that the price level was unchanged, $P = P^{ss} = S$. This would require $M = \gamma$. However, if $M = \gamma$ then the optimal price for firms in sector 1 is $p_1 = W/\gamma = 1$, which would mean that firms in sector 1 leave prices unchanged, a contradiction. Similarly, if the central bank tried to achieve correct relative prices while only having sectors k adjust, in which case $P = SM^{\frac{S-1}{S}}$, then this would require $M = 1$, which would cause firms in sectors k to not adjust, again a contradiction. Finally, if no sector adjusts, then it is impossible to achieve correct relative prices, since $p_1/p_k = 1$. It is only by having firms in all sectors adjust, in which case $P = SM\gamma^{-1/S}$, that the central bank can achieve both correct relative prices and ensure that $P = P^{ss}$, by setting $M = \gamma^{1/S}$. \square

4.2 Empirical estimates of the size of menu costs are sizeable

In this subsection, we review the literature measuring menu costs.

A reaction to proposition 2 may be the idea that the welfare costs imposed directly from updating prices could be relatively small. The literature on menu costs often builds on the idea that ‘second-order menu costs can result in first-order output fluctuations’ (Mankiw 1985), in which case the welfare loss of inflation targeting compared to optimal policy would be second-order.

However, it is important to note that in the textbook New Keynesian model with the exogenous Calvo friction, the welfare loss of price stickiness is *also* only second-order (see e.g. Galí 2008).

Additionally, estimates of the real resource cost of menu costs from the empirical literature in fact are quite sizeable and arguably underappreciated: at least 0.5% of total firm revenues annually. These estimates come from two sources: calibrated models and direct measurement.

Calibrated models. One method for estimating the size of menu costs is to measure the frequency of price adjustment, build a model of price adjustment with menu costs,

and calibrate the magnitude of menu costs to fit the microdata on the frequency of price adjustment. A number of papers perform this exercise, such as Nakamura and Steinsson (2010), who estimate the size of menu costs to be around 0.5% of revenue per year (their Table II). The more recent work of Blanco et al. (2022) finds that fitting the data would require 2.4% of firm revenue to be paid as menu costs. These estimates thus should be interpreted to capture total “menu costs”, very broadly construed, as described in section 3.4.

Direct measurement. A more direct and model-free approach to measuring menu costs is to simply measure them directly. However, because measuring all forms of menu costs – physical adjustment costs, information costs, psychological costs – is difficult, the extant measurement literature focuses on physical adjustment costs alone. These numbers should therefore be interpreted as a lower bound on the total size of “menu costs” for the relevant firms.

To our knowledge, only three papers directly measure menu costs. Levy et al. (1997) directly measures the physical costs of price adjustment for five large grocery store chains across the US. They directly measure the time spent by workers manually changing price stickers on grocery store shelves, using a stopwatch. Such time maps directly the menu cost parameter ψ in our model. They find such menu costs to be 0.7% of firm revenue on average. Dutta et al. (1999) use a similar approach to examine a large drugstore chain, with a narrower conception of menu costs, and find menu costs to be 0.6% of firm revenue. Finally, Zbaracki et al. (2004) examine an industrial manufacturer and, using a broader conception of menu costs, find such costs to be 1.2% of firm revenue.¹⁹

In short, the literature has found that menu costs – even when only examining the most measurable such costs – are no small matter.

4.3 Nonconvex menu costs vs. convex (Rotemberg) menu costs

In this subsection, we continue the comparison of optimal policy under menu costs to optimal policy in standard models. This will not only clarify our results but also will shed new light on existing literature.

Throughout this paper, we have used a model of “nonconvex menu costs”: the cost of price adjustment is *fixed* and does not scale with the size of a price change (Barro 1972; Sheshinski and Weiss 1977). That is, the menu cost facing a firm is *nonconvex* as a function of the size of its price change. Contrast this model with models of *convex* menu costs,

¹⁹Of course, any measurement of the level of expenditure on menu costs is endogenous to the existing monetary policy regime, as proposition 1 emphasizes.

where the cost of price adjustment depends on the magnitude of the desired price change, and this cost grows at an increasing rate.

Consider the canonical model of convex menu costs, the Rotemberg (1982) model of quadratic menu costs, where the menu cost scales with the square of the size of the price change:

$$\psi \cdot (p_i - p_i^{ss})^2$$

In contrast, in the model we present above, the menu cost is constant as a function of the size of the price change: where \mathbb{I} represents the indicator function,

$$\psi \cdot \mathbb{I}\{p_i \neq p_i^{ss}\}$$

It is well known that the single-sector Rotemberg convex menu cost model is isomorphic in its structural equations, to a first-order approximation, to the textbook New Keynesian model built on the Calvo time-dependent friction.²⁰ Furthermore, the model is isomorphic to a second-order approximation in its optimal policy implications to the Calvo model (Nisticò 2007), i.e. inflation targeting not wage targeting is optimal. In appendix C, we contribute to this literature by showing that the same first- and second-order isomorphisms can be made between the multisector Rotemberg model and the multisector Calvo model.

Why do Rotemberg *convex* menu costs imply inflation targeting is optimal, while our *nonconvex* menu costs imply nominal wage targeting is optimal?

The difference comes directly from the convex nature of the Rotemberg menu costs: due precisely to the convexity, it is better to have all sectors adjust prices a little than to have one sector do all of the adjustment. With the nonconvex menu costs of our model, it is instead optimal to minimize the number of sectors which choose to adjust at all.

The key intuition is in the labor market clearing condition. As we show in appendix C, the labor market clearing condition in the multisector Rotemberg model is:

$$N = \sum_{i=1}^S n_i + \psi \sum_{i=1}^S (p_i - p_i^{ss})^2 \quad (22)$$

²⁰Do note however that the *mechanism* of the Rotemberg model is very different from the Calvo model. Under Calvo, the welfare loss of monetary instability is the resulting relative price dispersion: total factor productivity is effectively lower. Under Rotemberg – and in our model – instead, the loss comes from the real resource cost of menu costs. If the quadratic menu cost requires extra labor, this comes from the additional labor required to adjust prices. If the quadratic menu cost is a real resource cost, then this is a wedge between consumption and output (see also footnote 12).

This contrasts with the labor market clearing condition under nonconvex menu costs, our equation (14):

$$N = \sum_{i=1}^S n_i + \psi \sum_{i=1}^S \mathbb{I}\{p_i \neq p_i^{ss}\}$$

Under both Rotemberg and under nonconvex menu costs, it is desirable to minimize the amount of menu costs because of the disutility of labor they create. Due to the *convex* nature of the Rotemberg menu costs in (22), it is better to *smooth* the price changes over all sectors: it is better to have a small price change in every sector, rather than a large price change in one sector. Under nonconvex menu costs, it is instead better to minimize the *count* of sectors which experience any price change. It this difference – convex versus non-convex costs of adjustment – which explains the differing optimal policy prescriptions.

4.4 Reexamining optimal policy in the Calvo model

Finally, we come to why optimal policy in the menu cost setting differs from optimal policy in the textbook Calvo model (Woodford 2003; Rubbo 2023).

Consider by analogy to the Rotemberg model. As discussed in the prior subsection, it is known that optimal policy under the Rotemberg and Calvo frictions are the same: inflation targeting. We also explained that the Rotemberg model and the fixed menu cost model have differing optimal policy implications because Rotemberg assumes a *convex* menu cost, implying that price changes should be spread over many sectors rather than concentrated in one sector.

Similarly, in the Calvo model, *the welfare cost of price dispersion is convex*. While a perfectly clean comparison with the menu cost model cannot be made due to the differing nature of the models – unlike the comparison of (22) versus (14) – the intuition can still be seen in the welfare-theoretic notion of price dispersion from the Calvo model. As standardly defined, price dispersion under Calvo is defined as:

$$\Delta \equiv \sum_{i=1}^S \int_0^1 \left[\frac{p_i(j)}{p_i} \right]^{-\eta} dj \quad (23)$$

Here, $\eta > 1$ continues to be the within-sector elasticity of substitution; and recall $p_i(j)$ is the nominal price of firm j in sector i , which now is heterogeneous within a sector thanks to the Calvo friction.

In the Calvo price dispersion formula, the convexity can be seen mechanically from the fact that the within-sector elasticity of substitution is positive, $\eta > 0$. The intuition

follows directly. Due to the Dixit-Stiglitz assumption of *complementarity across goods*, i.e. that $\eta > 0$, it is better to have many goods with slightly distorted prices, rather than to have few goods with highly distorted prices.

Illustration. This discussion is illustrated in figure 1. The figure depicts the level of sectoral prices p_i in a three-sector Calvo model where production technology is constant returns to scale and sectors have symmetric parameters. Marginal cost is, as in (11), W/A_i .

In subfigure 1a, the economy is at steady state, where by assumption all sectoral productivities and prices are equal. That is, if we normalize $W^{ss} = 1$ and $A_i^{ss} = 1$ as in section 2.7, then $p_i^{ss} = 1$.

We then consider an increase in productivity in sector 1 to $A_1 = \gamma > 1$. Subfigure 1b shows what would happen under flexible prices: firms in sector 1 would cut prices, while firms in other sectors remain unchanged. That is, $p_1 = 1/\gamma < 1$ and $p_k = 1$.²¹

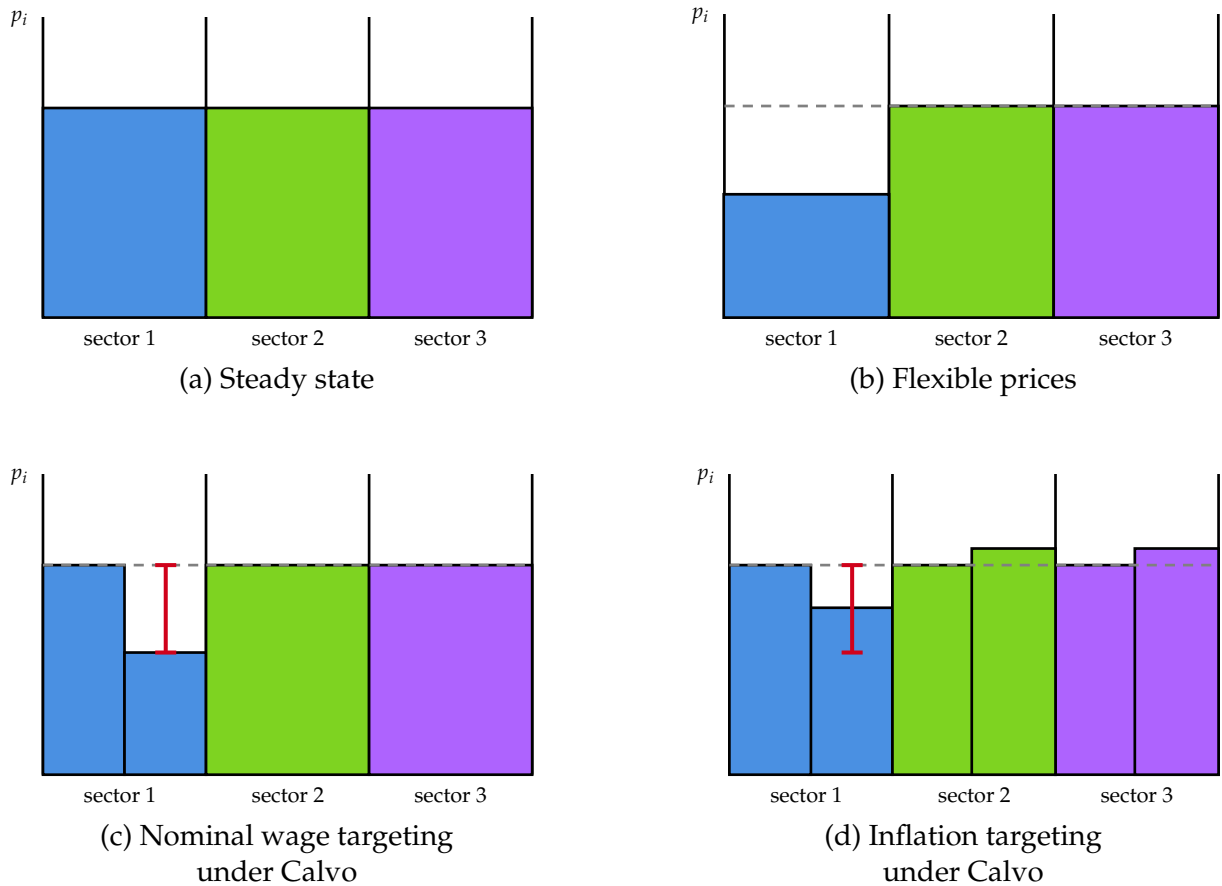


Figure 1: Sectoral prices under Calvo

²¹Of course, with flexible prices, the price level is indeterminate. The equilibrium described here can be characterized as an equilibrium refinement where the Calvo parameter is taken to zero.

Subfigure 1c shows what would happen to sectoral prices in the Calvo sticky-price world under nominal wage targeting. Firms in sector 1 want to cut their prices to the flexible-price level. However, only some fraction of firms in that sector may do so, thanks to the Calvo friction. Other firms remain stuck at the steady state price, and have the wrong price. This creates within-sector price dispersion – the blue area in sector 1 is not uniformly the same height – as well as incorrect relative prices between these unchanged sector-1 firms and firms in other sectors. However, there is no within-sector price dispersion in other sectors: the green area in sector 2 has a uniform height, as does the purple area in sector 3. Firms in unshocked sectors are thus not affected by the shock.

Subfigure 1d shows what happens to sectoral prices in the Calvo world under inflation targeting, which is optimal policy in this setting. Now, monetary policy seeks to ensure that on average prices are unchanged. This requires the central bank to induce an increase in nominal wages. The result is that firms in sector 1 want to cut their prices, but not as much as under stable nominal wages; and firms in other sectors want to increase their prices. Because of the Calvo friction, only a fraction of firms in each sector is able to set the optimal price. As a result, there is within-sector dispersion in *all* sectors: every sector contains firms with differing prices.

As described above, the benefit of disturbing sectors 2 and 3 under inflation targeting is that *the sector-1 price dispersion is lessened*. That is, the gap in heights between the two blue bars is lessened compared to nominal wage targeting, as indicated by the red line. Because of the convexity of the welfare cost of this gap, the welfare benefit from this decrease outweighs the incorrect prices induced in other sectors.

Future work. This suggests an important target for empirical work: *how convex are the costs of price changes* as a function of the size of the change? To our knowledge, this question has received little or no quantitative attention in the empirical literature cited in section 4.2. Since the convexity of price adjustment costs has direct implications for the optimal target for monetary policy, this seems like an important gap to fill.

Additionally, future work could consider coordination frictions that dampen the ability of monetary policy to smooth shocks across sectors. The exogenous nature of the Calvo friction means that firms in unshocked sectors respond symmetrically to a movement in nominal wages induced by monetary policy as do firms in the shocked sector in response to the shock. More realistically, firms may more easily adjust prices following a productivity shock, since they are more likely to be aware of it. This would be natural if productivity changes are in fact *endogenous*, rather than an exogenous shock; or in models of rational inattention where sectoral shocks typically receive more attention,

endogenously, than aggregate shocks (Maćkowiak, Matějka and Wiederholt 2023).

5 Extensions to the benchmark model

We now consider several natural extensions to the model, which we continue to solve analytically. These showcase the robustness of our results, and are useful for reinforcing the intuition built above, regarding the mechanism of the results.

The core intuition argued above is that monetary policy seeks to ensure that nominal marginal costs are unchanged for firms who do not receive a productivity shock, so that they have no desire to adjust their prices. This intuition is preserved even as the model is extended in various directions. What does change, however, is the formula for the nominal marginal cost for an unshocked firm.

5.1 Functional form generalizations

Consider the baseline model of section 2, but allow for the following generalizations:

1. Any constant returns to scale production technology for final goods, with (4) becoming $Y = F(y_1, \dots, y_S)$ with F homogenous of degree 1
2. Potentially decreasing returns to scale in production technology, with (10) becoming $y_i(j) = A_i n_i(j)^{1/\alpha}$ with $1/\alpha \in (0, 1]$
3. Any household preferences quasilinear in labor, with (1) becoming $W = U(C, \frac{M}{P}) - N$

Denote this as the generalized model.²²

As in the baseline model, nominal marginal costs are an important object. Nominal marginal costs can be derived as:

$$MC_i(j) = \left[\alpha \frac{W}{A_i^\alpha} (y_i p_i^\eta)^{\alpha-1} \right]^\theta \quad (24)$$

$$\theta = [1 - \eta(1 - \alpha)]^{-1} \quad (25)$$

²²In the generalized model, the functional form for utility remains quasilinear in labor, as with Golosov-Lucas preferences. As discussed in section 3.1 and footnote 14, this is necessary to ensure that the income effects induced by menu costs do not distort the consumption-leisure margin. In the model of appendix B, where menu costs are modeled as a utility penalty and therefore do not reduce household income, preferences need not be quasilinear in labor and can be fully general. Alternatively, consider if menu costs are modeled as a loss of profits without transfer to the household (as in e.g. Alvarez et al. 2019). Then, we would want to ensure there is no income effect on *labor supply* rather than no income effect on consumption. In other words, preferences would have to be of the Greenwood, Hercowitz and Huffman (1988) form.

Observe that if α were equal to one, then $\theta = 1$ and $MC_i(j) = W/A_i$, as in equation (11) of the baseline model. In this more general model, marginal cost depends on not just wages and productivity, but also on demand. This is due to the decreasing returns to scale of the production technology.

As a result, optimal policy in this general model thus does not exactly stabilize nominal wages, but instead stabilizes (24) for unshocked sectors, as the next proposition describes. The intuition remains the same: ensuring that only the shocked sector adjusts and others do not minimizes the menu costs incurred by the economy.

Proposition 3 (Functional form generalizations). Consider again the positive productivity shock γ affecting sector 1, in the generalized model. For a fixed level of menu costs ψ , there exists a threshold level of productivity $\bar{\gamma} > 1$, such that:

1. If the productivity shock to sector 1 is above the threshold, $\gamma \geq \bar{\gamma}$, then optimal policy is to ensure the nominal marginal costs of firms outside sector 1 are unchanged. This results in firms in sector 1 adjusting their price, while firms in other sectors k leave prices unchanged.
2. If the shock is below the threshold, $\gamma \in [1, \bar{\gamma})$, then optimal policy is to ensure that prices remain unchanged and no firm in any sector adjusts.

Additionally, the productivity threshold $\bar{\gamma}$ is increasing in the size of menu costs ψ .

Proof: The proof follows exactly the same steps as in the proof of proposition 1. □

The statement of proposition 3 is precisely the same as the statement of proposition 1, except that instead of stabilizing *nominal wages* to ensure unshocked firms do not adjust, the central bank stabilizes the *nominal marginal costs* of unshocked firms. These marginal costs depend on demand, which is affected by the shock to sector 1.

An example. In the most abstract case, optimal policy cannot be characterized more sharply than proposition 3. However, it is instructive to consider a special case that is common in much of the optimal policy literature.

Suppose preferences over consumption and real balances are isoelastic; aggregation technology is Cobb-Douglas; and continue to allow for decreasing returns to scale technology:

$$W = \frac{1}{1-\sigma} C^{1-\sigma} + \frac{1}{1-\sigma} \left(\frac{M}{P} \right)^{1-\sigma} - N$$

$$Y = \prod_{i=1}^S y_i^{1/S}$$

$$y_i(j) = A_i n_i(j)^{1/\alpha}$$

In particular, this differs from the baseline model by allowing for isoelastic preferences and also decreasing returns to scale.

In this example, it can be shown that marginal cost is a weighted average of nominal wages and the aggregate price level:

$$MC_i(j) = k \frac{W^\lambda P^{1-\lambda}}{A_i} \quad (26)$$

$$\lambda \equiv \frac{\sigma + \alpha - 1}{\sigma \alpha} \quad (27)$$

where k is an unimportant constant.²³

Thus, in this specification, following a shock to sector-1 productivity alone then the central bank should stabilize $W^\lambda P^{1-\lambda}$. This means manipulating nominal wages W to offset any change in the aggregate price level P caused by the change in prices in sector 1. By holding steady $W^\lambda P^{1-\lambda}$, the central bank ensures nominal marginal costs are unchanged for firms outside sector 1, causing them to leave prices unchanged.

How much weight should the central bank give to stabilizing wages versus prices? We offer a more complete assessment in the quantitative model of section 6, but we may here consider a back of the envelope calculation. A typical calibration for σ , the inverse of the elasticity of intertemporal substitution, is $\sigma = 2$; a typical calibration for α might be $1/\alpha = 0.6$ to match the labor share. Plugging these values into (27) would result in the central bank putting a weight of $\lambda = 0.8$ on stabilizing nominal wages, and a weight of $1 - \lambda = 0.2$ on stabilizing inflation.

5.2 Sectoral heterogeneity and a monetary “least-cost avoider” principle

We now return to the baseline setting and consider two kinds of heterogeneity, in sector size and menu cost magnitude, that lead us to a “least-cost avoider” interpretation of optimal monetary policy. We offer economic intuition on each in turn, and then state the result formally.

²³ $k = \frac{1}{S} (\alpha S)^{1/\alpha}$.

5.2.1 Heterogeneity in sector size

Suppose that sectors are of different sizes. Instead of each sector containing a continuum of firms on $[0, 1]$, allow sector i to range over $[0, S_i]$ for some finite S_i . We then denote $S \equiv \sum_i S_i$. Let everything else in the model remain as in the baseline model.

Heterogeneity in sector size affects the labor market clearing condition:

$$N = \sum_i n_i + \psi \sum_i S_i \chi_i \quad (28)$$

Heterogeneity in sector size interacts with menu costs, since larger sectors require hiring more labor to adjust prices.

With this change, optimal policy is *nearly* the exact same as characterized in proposition 1. What differs is only in the extreme case when sector 1 is larger than all other sectors put together, $S_1 > \sum_{k>1} S_k$. Then if relative prices are to adjust it is actually optimal to have firms *outside* sector 1 adjust their price in response to a shock affecting sector 1 itself. That is because although it is only sector 1 which is affected by the shock, the combined mass of firms outside sector 1 is smaller than sector 1 itself. Therefore the menu costs burned by having all other firms adjust price is less than the menu costs burned by having “just” sector 1 adjust.

Thus under the (extreme) assumption that sector 1 is larger than the combined mass of all other sectors, implementing the regime where ‘only sectors k adjust’ is preferable to implementing the regime where ‘only 1 adjusts’. This has the same intuition that it achieves the correct relative prices while economizing on menu costs – where, here, economizing on menu costs means having sector 1 not adjust. This policy would not stabilize nominal wages (or inflation).

We interpret this case as an illustration of the logic of our results, rather than an empirically-relevant case in general. Only in the case where *more than half* of the economy is *homogeneously* affected by the same shock does this result carry through. Otherwise, the optimal policy prescriptions of proposition 1 carry through exactly.

5.2.2 Heterogeneity in menu cost size

Introducing heterogeneity in menu cost size by sector is mostly similar. If the menu cost of sector i is ψ_i , the labor market clearing (14) becomes:

$$N = \sum_i n_i + \sum_i S_i \psi_i \chi_i$$

Observe that the direct effect of heterogeneity in menu costs (ψ_i) on welfare is isomorphic to that of heterogeneity in sector size (S_i). But heterogeneity in menu cost size, unlike that in sector size, *also* affects the size of inaction regions given in (13). However, this additional complication has somewhat limited impact.

First – analogous to the possibility just discussed that sector 1 is very large in size – if weighted the menu costs of sector 1 are extremely large relative to those of other sectors, $S_1\psi_1 > \sum_{k>1} S_k\psi_k$, then it again is optimal to have all firms outside sector 1 adjust rather than those in sector 1 if relative prices are to change. Second, variation in ψ_1 does affect when it is optimal to allow prices to go unchanged, i.e. affects the value of the threshold $\bar{\gamma}$.

5.2.3 Interpretation: a monetary “least-cost avoider” principle

We summarize both the above results in the following proposition.

Proposition 4 (Sectoral heterogeneity). Suppose sector i is of size S_i and has menu cost ψ_i . Suppose further that the size-weighted menu cost of sector 1 is smaller than the combined weighted average of menu costs for other sectors, $S_1\psi_1 < \sum_{k>1} S_k\psi_k$. Then optimal monetary is exactly the same as characterized in proposition 1 modulo changes in the constant $\bar{\gamma}$.

Proof: Under the assumption about the magnitude of weighted menu costs, the proof follows exactly as in the proof of proposition 1. \square

These two results on sectoral size and menu cost heterogeneity, summarized in proposition 4, can be interpreted as a “least-cost avoider” theory of optimal monetary policy. In the economic analysis of law, the least-cost avoider principal states that when considering assignment of liability between parties, it is efficient to assign liability to the party who has the lowest cost of avoiding harm (Calabresi 1970). Similarly, the generalized principle of optimal monetary policy under menu costs is: *the agents for whom it is least costly to adjust their price are the agents who should do so.*

More closely to the monetary economics literature, this is also very related to the idea that ‘monetary policy should target the stickiest price’ (e.g. Mankiw and Reis 2003 and Aoki 2001). Under menu costs, the central bank should minimize adjustment by the firms with the most expensive menu costs – i.e. it should stabilize the stickiest prices.

5.3 Multiple shocks

In the baseline exercise analyzed in proposition 1, we consider a shock to the productivity of sector 1 alone. One motivation for this is the idea that in reality productivity shocks arrive as Poisson shocks, separated by spans of time, with no two sectors ever being shocked at precisely at the same time. Such a motivation introduces an intertemporal aspect which we do not study in the analytical model, however – though we will consider the role of dynamics in the quantitative results of section 6.

In this section, we consider the case where an arbitrary set of sectors is shocked, including possibly every sector. Start again at steady state, where every sector has productivity of $A_i^{ss} = 1$. We consider the exercise of shocking every sector to productivity A_i , where A_i could be potentially above, below, or equal to 1: it may be a positive shock, it may be a negative shock, or the sector may be unshocked.

Equilibrium. It is illustrative to consider a generic equilibrium when some fixed subset of sectors $\Omega \subseteq \{1, \dots, S\}$ adjusts, while the remaining sectors do not adjust. Denote the cardinality of Ω as $\omega \equiv |\Omega|$. Sectors which adjust update their price to $p_i = M/A_i$, whereas others remain at the steady state value of $p_i^{ss} = 1$. The aggregate price level thus aggregates from (6) to:

$$P = \frac{SM^{\omega/S}}{\prod_{i \in \Omega} A_i^{1/S}}$$

From the quantity equation (2), this gives consumption and output as:

$$C = Y = \frac{1}{S} \left[\prod_{i \in \Omega} A_i^{1/S} \right] M^{\frac{S-\omega}{S}}$$

For comparison, the flexible-price level of output is $Y_{\text{flex}} = \frac{1}{S} \prod_{i=1}^S A_i^{1/S}$. Using sectoral demand, production technology, and labor market aggregation, the amount of aggregate labor is:

$$N = \frac{\omega}{S} + \frac{M}{S} \sum_{i \notin \Omega} \frac{1}{A_i} + \psi\omega$$

Thus, welfare – conditional on the set Ω of sectors adjusting – as a function of the choice of money supply, is:

$$W_{\Omega}(M) = \ln \left[\frac{1}{S} \left[\prod_{i \in \Omega} A_i^{1/S} \right] M^{\frac{S-\omega}{S}} \right] - \left[\frac{\omega}{S} + \frac{M}{S} \sum_{i \notin \Omega} \frac{1}{A_i} + \psi\omega \right] \quad (29)$$

As before allowing the social planner to overcome adjustment externalities, the optimal choice of money supply (conditional on Ω sectors adjusting) is found directly from the first order condition of (29).²⁴ The first order condition gives:

$$M_{\Omega}^* = \frac{S - \omega}{\sum_{i \notin \Omega} \frac{1}{A_i}} \quad (30)$$

Welfare under optimal policy, conditional on the set Ω of sectors adjusting, is:

$$W_{\Omega}^* = \ln \left[\frac{1}{S} \left[\prod_{i \in \Omega} A_i^{1/S} \right] \left(\frac{S - \omega}{\sum_{i \notin \Omega} \frac{1}{A_i}} \right)^{\frac{S-\omega}{S}} \right] - [1 + \psi\omega] \quad (31)$$

Replicating the flexible-price allocation. Now, it is only possible replicate the flexible-price allocation – aside from the extra labor required for menu costs – in two cases. First, as before, if all sectors adjust, i.e. $\Omega = \{1, \dots, S\}$ and $\omega = S$, then naturally this ensures the flexible-price allocation. This comes at the cost of S sectors' worth of menu costs.

The flexible-price allocation can, however, be achieved also if $\omega = S - 1$, so all but one sector adjust. The one non-adjusting sector simply may be any arbitrary sector r . In this case, the central bank would set the money supply at $M = \frac{1}{A_r}$. This ensures that the desired price of sector r , that is $\frac{W}{A_r}$, equals the steady-state level of $p_r^{ss} = 1$, so that despite not changing its price, sector r has the price that it would choose if it were to adjust. This comes at the cost of $S - 1$ sectors' worth of menu costs.

An immediate implication is that it is never optimal to have all S sectors to adjust, since the same allocation can be achieved if $S - 1$ sectors adjust, but with less labor required for menu costs. In other words, it is always best to peg at least one sector and ensure that at least that one sector need not adjust its price. This sector may be arbitrarily chosen in the baseline model. If sectors were of heterogeneous size or had heterogeneous menu cost sizes, as in proposition 4, then it would be optimal to choose the sector with the largest size-weighted menu costs. This reinforces the “least-cost avoider principle”

²⁴As long as the number of sectors adjusting is not all S sectors, i.e. $\omega < S$. If all sectors adjust, i.e. if $\omega = S$ and $\Omega = \emptyset$, then welfare is independent of the choice of the money supply M .

interpretation, or the “stabilize the stickiest price” interpretation described in that proposition.

If more than one sector leaves their price unchanged, i.e. $\omega < S - 1$, then it is not possible to achieve the flexible-price allocation. This is the standard result that when relative prices change, if there is sufficient nominal rigidity, the flexible-price allocation cannot be achieved: there is more than one target (the many relative prices), but only one instrument, M (Poole 1970).

Interpreting conditionally-optimal policy. Since it is still the case that nominal wages are determined by monetary policy, $W = M$, it follows from (30) that nominal wages conditional on sectors Ω adjusting are:²⁵

$$W_{\Omega}^* = \frac{S - \omega}{\sum_{i \notin \Omega} \frac{1}{A_i}} \quad (32)$$

To emphasize, the equilibrium nominal wage under optimal policy depends on the central bank’s choice of the set of adjusting firms Ω . However, for any fixed choice of Ω , this is the equilibrium nominal wage.

From (32), we can see that optimal policy will stabilize nominal wages, $W_{\Omega}^* = W^{ss}$, if all firms who do not adjust are unshocked.

Thus we can summarize optimal policy under multiple shocks as follows.

Proposition 5 (Optimal policy with multiple shocks). Consider an arbitrary set of productivity shocks to the baseline model, $\{A_1, \dots, A_S\}$.

1. Conditional on sectors $\Omega \subseteq \{1, \dots, S\}$ adjusting, optimal policy is given by setting $M = M_{\Omega}^*$ defined in (30).
2. The optimal set of sectors that should adjust, Ω^* , is given by comparing welfare under the various possibilities for Ω , using W_{Ω}^* defined in (31).
3. Nominal wage targeting is exactly optimal if the set of sectors which should not adjust, are unshocked: $A_i = 1 \ \forall i \notin \Omega^*$.

Even when optimal policy does not exactly stabilize nominal wages, it may nonetheless be considered to approximately do so. For $A_i \approx 1$, it is the case that $\frac{1}{A_i} \approx 1$; this implies that $\sum_{i \notin \Omega} \frac{1}{A_i} \approx \sum_{i \notin \Omega} 1 = S - \omega$, and so by (32) nominal wages are approximately unchanged, $W_{\Omega}^* \approx \frac{S - \omega}{S - \omega} = 1$. As in proposition 1, it will only be optimal to adjust for

²⁵For any Ω with $\omega < S$. With $\omega = S$, nominal wages are indeterminate and may be anything. We may then for simplicity choose the level given in (32).

sectors which experience larger shocks. As a result, for sectors $i \notin \Omega$, i.e. for sectors i not adjusting, it will particularly be the case that $A_i \approx 1$.

Ultimately, the performance of exact nominal wage targeting in the face of multiple shocks depends on an empirical question – the distribution of shocks, and how tightly centered around 1 they are – and a quantitative question – how well exact nominal wage targeting performs compared to the analytically optimal policy. We now answer this question in a quantitative, dynamic model.

5.4 Production networks

In this subsection, we consider a variant of the baseline model where intermediate firms use not just labor as a factor of production, but also use other goods as an input. We consider the symmetric roundabout economy of Basu (1995).

We need only alter the intermediate firm's problem. Suppose the production function of firm j in sector i is now:

$$y_i(j) = A_i n_i(j)^\beta I_i(j)^{1-\beta} \quad (33)$$

$$I_i(j) = \prod_{k=1}^S I_{ki}(j)^{1/S}$$

Here, $I_i(j)$ is the composite intermediate good used by firm j in sector i to produce output. It has weight $1 - \beta$ in production compared to β for labor; setting $\beta = 1$ returns us to the baseline model. The composite intermediate good is a bundle of outputs from every other sector: $I_{ki}(j)$ is output *from* sector k purchased by the firm j in sector i . Output from every other sector is bundled into the symmetric Cobb-Douglas composite, which is used in production.

With input-output linkages, the marginal cost of a given firm now depends on not just wages but also on the price of every other good in the economy. The firm's problem now consists not only of choosing the price $p_i(j)$, but also choosing the input demand $n_i(j)$ and $I_i(j)$. These demand functions can be found from cost minimization.

It can then be shown that nominal marginal cost is a weighted average of nominal wages and the aggregate price index:

$$MC_i(j) = k \frac{W^\beta p^{1-\beta}}{A_i} \quad (34)$$

where k is an unimportant constant.²⁶ The marginal cost has a weight β on wages, reflecting labor's share of β in the production function (33). The price index has a weight $1 - \beta$, reflecting that intermediates have a share of $1 - \beta$ in the production function, and the average price of intermediates is precisely the average price of goods in the economy: i.e., the price index.

In response to the baseline shock affecting only sector 1, optimal policy thus is to stabilize this weighted average of wages and prices, with the weights determined by β . This parallels the example in section 5.1, where optimal policy also stabilized a weighted average of wages and prices. To get a sense of the implications for policy, we can consider off-the-shelf calibrations for β : Basu (1995) suggests β is at most 50%; Nakamura and Steinsson (2010) estimate that β is roughly 30%.

Proposition 6 (Roundabout economy). Consider again the positive productivity shock γ affecting sector 1, in the baseline model augmented with the roundabout production technology of (33). For a fixed level of menu costs ψ , there exists a threshold level of productivity $\bar{\gamma} > 1$, such that:

1. If the productivity shock to sector 1 is above the threshold, $\gamma \geq \bar{\gamma}$, then optimal policy is to ensure the nominal marginal costs of firms outside sector 1 are unchanged. This is implemented by stabilizing $W^\beta P^{1-\beta}$. This results in firms in sector 1 adjusting their price, while firms in other sectors k leave prices unchanged.
2. If the shock is below the threshold, $\gamma \in [1, \bar{\gamma})$, then optimal policy is to ensure that prices remain unchanged and no firm in any sector adjusts.

Proof: The proof follows exactly the same steps as in the proof of proposition 1. □

5.5 Sticky wages

Throughout the paper thus far, we have considered a model with sticky prices and flexible wages; we now consider the case where wages are sticky due to a fixed menu cost and prices are flexible. If the model has the typical structure of the sticky wage literature (e.g. Erceg, Henderson and Levin 2000), with wages set by unions, then optimal policy remains nominal wage targeting.

5.5.1 The traditional model structure: sticky wages with union

[to be written up]

²⁶ $k = \frac{1}{(1-\alpha)^{1-\alpha} \alpha^\alpha}.$

5.5.2 A symmetric model structure: sticky wages with monopsony

[to be written up]

5.6 Optimal policy without selection effects

The existence (or not) of selection effects in menu cost models is an important question in the literature, due to the argument that selection effects reduce monetary non-neutrality relative to models with time-dependent pricing like the Calvo model (Golosov and Lucas 2007; Caballero and Engel 2007; Karadi, Schoenle and Wursten 2022; Gautier et al. 2022). The question this literature generally considers is: in response to a *monetary policy shock*, how much is real output affected? On the other hand, under optimal monetary policy naturally there are no monetary shocks.

However, for the main mechanism we highlight in this paper – a “menu cost channel of optimal monetary policy” – the existence or not of selection effects plays little role. This can be seen by considering two model variants:

1. A menu cost model without selection effects, where firms always set price equal to nominal marginal cost but must pay a menu cost if doing so requires a change in price.
2. A menu cost model where some firms randomly are allowed to change prices for free, dampening selection effects (the “CalvoPlus” model).

We consider the same exercise as section 3 and show that optimal policy continues to be nominal wage targeting.

5.6.1 Optimal policy in a menu cost model without selection

[to be written up]

5.6.2 Optimal policy in the CalvoPlus model

[to be written up]

6 Quantitative model

In this section, we develop a dynamic version of our baseline model, augmented with idiosyncratic shocks as well as more general functional forms, calibrated to the US econ-

omy. After providing further detail on the model setup and detailing the solution method, this section shows the following.

1. In response to a variety of shocks, nominal wage targeting generates higher welfare than does inflation targeting.
2. We also solve numerically for the optimal Taylor rule weights on nominal wages, inflation, and output in response to these shocks. Nominal wage targeting closely approximates the optimal rule.
3. Decomposing welfare losses into excess menu costs versus incorrect relative prices, we show that nominal wage targeting reduces excess menu costs by 50% compared to inflation targeting.
4. The parameters which have the largest quantitative impact on the size of the welfare gains of nominal wage targeting are: the size of menu costs (ψ), the persistence of shocks, the within-sector elasticity of substitution, and the relative importance of sectoral shocks. We offer economic intuition for each.
5. We show that the rising importance of sectoral shocks over time in the US economy has implied that the gains to switching to nominal wage targeting have risen commensurately.

6.1 Model description and solution method

Our dynamic multisector model of menu costs is similar to that in Nakamura and Steinsson (2010). The main difference is that we include sector-specific productivity shocks on top of idiosyncratic, firm-level shocks. To solve for the aggregate dynamics of the economy, we use the sequence-space Jacobian approach of Auclert et al. (2021).

Household. The household chooses paths for consumption, C_t , labor N_t , money balances, M_t , and bonds, B_t to maximize the present discounted value of utility. The problem faced by the household is:

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{\{C_t, N_t, B_t, M_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}} \quad & \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t \left[\frac{C_t^{1-\gamma}}{1-\gamma} - \omega \frac{N_t^{1+\varphi}}{1+\varphi} + \ln \left(\frac{M_t}{P_t} \right) \right] \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & P_t C_t + B_t + M_t \leq R_t B_{t-1} + W_t N_t + M_{t-1} + D_t - T_t \end{aligned} \quad (35)$$

This problem represents a dynamic version of the static household problem presented in section 2.1, with more general preferences. To consume and save (the left hand side of the

budget constraint) the household uses gross wealth, money holdings, labor earnings, and firm dividends net of the lump sum tax imposed by the government (the right hand side of the budget constraint). R_t is the nominal interest rate on bonds.

Firms. Final and sectoral good producing firms behave similarly to the baseline analytical model presented of section 2. In particular, these firms operate in competitive environments and aggregate the goods produced by the corresponding lower-tier firms according to the technologies:

$$Y_t = \prod_{i=1}^S y_{it}^{1/S} \quad (36)$$

$$y_{it} = \left[\int_0^1 y_{it}(j)^{\frac{\eta-1}{\eta}} dj \right]^{\frac{\eta}{\eta-1}} \quad (37)$$

Intermediate firms. A first key difference in the quantitative model compared to the baseline model of section 2 is that intermediate firms are now subject not only to sector-level productivity shocks, A_{it} , but also to idiosyncratic, firm-level shocks $a_{it}(j)$. A second difference is that firms' production technology displays potentially decreasing returns to labor with parameter $\alpha \leq 1$:

$$y_{it}(j) = a_{it}(j) A_{it} n_{it}(j)^\alpha \quad (38)$$

Firm-level idiosyncratic shocks follow an AR(1) process with persistence ρ_{idio} . The innovations in these processes are Gaussian, $\varepsilon_t^{\text{idio}} \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_{\text{idio}}^2)$.

$$\log(a_{it}(j)) = \rho_{\text{idio}} \log(a_{it-1}(j)) + \varepsilon_t^{\text{idio}} \quad (39)$$

The firm maximizes the present discounted value of real profits. In any given period the firm chooses whether to update its price, $\chi_{it}(j) = 1$, or to keep its price unchanged, $\chi_{it}(j) = 0$. If the firm decides to change its price $p_{it}(j)$, it must pay a menu cost worth ψ hours of labor. The problem intermediate firms face is:

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{p_{it}(j)} \quad & \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \mathbb{E} \left[\frac{1}{R^t P_t} \{ p_{it}(j) y_{it}(j) - W_t n_{it}(j) (1 - \tau) - \chi_{it}(j) \psi W_t \} \right] \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \chi_{it}(j) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } p_{it}(j) \neq p_{it-1}(j) \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \end{aligned} \quad (40)$$

$$\begin{aligned}
y_{it}(j) &= y_{it} \left(\frac{p_{it}(j)}{p_{it}} \right)^{-\eta} \\
y_{it}(j) &= A_{it} a_{it}(j) n_{it}(j)^\alpha \\
R^t &= \prod_{\tau=0}^t R_\tau
\end{aligned}$$

where τ is the labor subsidy.

6.2 Calibration

The model is calibrated to match salient micro and macro moments of the US economy at the quarterly frequency. There are two sets of parameters. The first set of parameters is standard and taken from the macroeconomics literature. The second is calibrated to match price-adjustment behavior by US firms. The model parameters are listed in table 1.

The preference parameters are set to standard values. The discount factor $\beta = 0.995$ is chosen to match a 2% annualized interest rate. The disutility of labor is $\omega = 1$, the inverse Frisch elasticity is $\varphi = 1$, and the inverse elasticity of intertemporal substitution is $\gamma = 2$.

Following Nakamura and Steinsson (2010), we choose $S = 6$ sectors, their small-scale model. Unlike their paper, we assume the sectors are identical: firms in different sectors are subject to the same idiosyncratic productivity processes and face the same menu cost but they are subject to orthogonal sectoral shocks. The baseline elasticity of substitution across goods within sector is $\eta = 5$ and the decreasing return to scale parameter is $\alpha = 0.6$.²⁷ The labor subsidy $\tau = \frac{1}{\eta} = 0.2$ is set to offset the markup distortion.

We select three parameters to match the price-changing behavior of US firms. These parameters are the standard deviation and persistence of idiosyncratic productivity shocks, σ_{idio} and ρ_{idio} , as well as the size of the menu cost ψ , that is the hours of labor required to change prices. These parameters are set to match two targets. First, per the literature cited in section 4.2, we target a menu cost expenditure as a share of firm revenue of 1%. Second, following Nakamura and Steinsson (2010), we target a median frequency of price change of 26.1%.²⁸ The resulting estimated parameters are $\sigma_{\text{idio}} = 0.18$, $\rho_{\text{idio}} = 0.874$, and $\psi = 0.0138$ leading to a menu cost to revenue share of 1.00% and a share of firms changing price in each quarter of 26.06%.

²⁷We run robustness analysis for different values of η and α in appendix D.

²⁸They find a *monthly* median of 8.7%

Table 1: Model parameters and baseline calibration

| | Parameter (quarterly frequency) | Value | Target |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------|--|
| β | Discount factor | 0.995 | 2% annual interest rate |
| ω | Disutility of labor | 1 | standard |
| φ | Inverse Frisch elasticity | 1 | standard |
| γ | Inverse EIS | 2 | standard |
| S | Number of sectors | 6 | Nakamura and Steinsson (2010) |
| η | Elasticity of subst. between sectors | 5 | standard value |
| α | Returns to scale | 0.6 | standard value |
| τ | Labor subsidy | 0.2 | $1/\eta$ |
| σ_{idio} | Std. of idio. shocks | 0.18 | menu cost expenditure / revenue $\sim 1\%$ |
| ρ_{idio} | Persistence of idio. shocks | 0.874 | and |
| ψ | Menu cost | 0.0138 | share of price changers $\sim 26.1\%$ |

6.3 Model solution

To solve the model numerically we rely on the sequence-space Jacobian method developed in Auclert et al. (2021). We solve the model *nonlinearly* because, as we will show, nonlinearities are important in this model.

For a large class of models, linearized transitional dynamics closely approximate non-linear dynamics. Auclert et al. (2023) show that even in some menu cost models the linear transition dynamics approximate the non-linear solution well. Here we argue that, because of menu costs and, importantly, the sectoral structure of the economy, nonlinearities are relevant.

Before jumping into “why” nonlinearities matter, we first establish that they do. To do so, we shock the economy with a persistent 5% shock to sector one productivity, A_1 . Because welfare will be our ultimate object of interest, consider in figure 2 how welfare behaves under a nominal wage targeting regime in three different scenarios. The black solid and red dashed lines show linear and non-linear welfare responses to a positive 5% persistent increase in A_1 , respectively. The dotted blue line shows the (negative) non-linear welfare response to a negative 5% shock. The linear and non-linear responses to the positive shock have the same shape but the linear response is everywhere larger in magnitude. The non-linear responses to the positive and negative shocks are different in both shape and magnitude.

What is at the root of this non-linear behavior? First compare the linear and non-linear responses to a positive productivity shock (black solid versus red dashed). Because it is linear, the black line scales in the size of the shock. Sector-level shocks lead to nonlinearities because they move a non-zero mass of firms beyond their inaction threshold. In contrast, firm-level shocks, by their idiosyncratic nature, only move a firm with 0 mass beyond its threshold. This results in aggregates not scaling in the size of sector-level

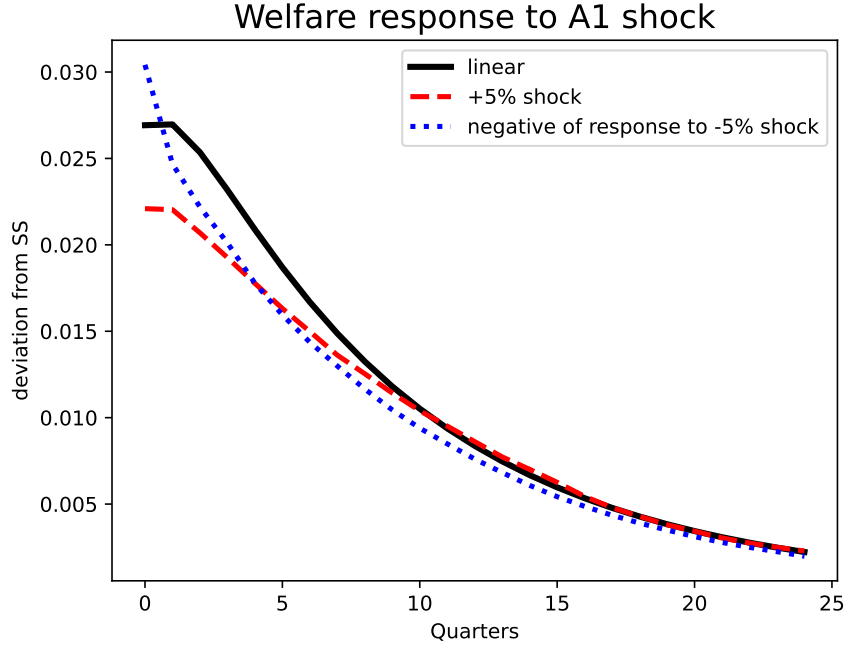


Figure 2: Welfare response to a 5% shock in sector 1 productivity in three cases: linear solution, non- linear solution with +5% shock, non-linear solution with −5% shock.

shocks.

Next contrast the welfare effects of a positive shock to the negative welfare effects of a negative shock (red dashed versus blue dotted, we take the negative for each of comparison). Under linearity, the red and blue lines should be identical: a negative shock has the same effect as a positive shock only with opposite sign. This is clearly not the case here: welfare falls by more after a negative shock than it increases after a positive shock. Why? The reason for this is that menu costs can only be positive. Suppose the efficiency gain after a positive shock were the same in magnitude as the efficiency loss after a negative shock. Suppose further than the same menu costs are expended after the two shocks. The menu cost expenditures can be of the same magnitude but can never be of opposite sign since menu costs are always non-negative. In other words,

$$|\text{efficiency} - \text{menu cost exp.}| < |-\text{efficiency} - \text{menu cost exp.}|$$

and so the menu cost expenditure amplifies the magnitude of the response to a negative shock relative to a positive shock.²⁹

²⁹The discussion here emphasizes *sign* nonlinearities: the economy reacts differently to negative versus positive shocks. Menu cost models with state dependence also predict *size* nonlinearities: thanks to inaction regions, the economy reacts differently to small versus large shocks. Barnichon and Mesters (2023) show

6.4 One-time sectoral shock [still linear solution]

The first experiment we present mimics the one studied in the static model where we compare nominal wage targeting versus price-level targeting.

Firms in sector 1 are hit by a 5% productivity increase which decays exponentially, while firms in all other sectors are subject to no sector-level shocks. Figure 3 displays the time path of A_1 in percentage points deviation from steady state, as well as the path of economic aggregates under a nominal wage targeting rule. As the third panel shows, the nominal wage W is stable, while the price level P falls in response to a positive productivity shock. While in the background, in all sectors some firms are changing prices because of idiosyncratic shocks, the third panel confirms the result from the static model: sectoral price index p_1 drops while sectoral price indices p_2 and p_3 remain constant. The reason for this is that, on average, firms in sectors 2 and 3 do not face changes in their nominal marginal costs and hence the average price level remains unchanged.

Figure 4 shows the welfare response to a 5% productivity increase in sector $i = 1$ under a nominal wage targeting regime (black solid line) and a price level targeting regime (purple dash-dotted line). Welfare under nominal wage targeting is higher at all points in time. The key to understanding this result lies in the quantity of menu costs expended in the economy: as figure 5 indicates, implementing a price level target requires a higher menu cost expenditure which in turn requires higher labor demand by firms. This negatively affects welfare through the labor disutility term in 35.

Under nominal wage targeting, in contrast to the static model, firms in all sectors will have a motive to change prices because of the presence of idiosyncratic shocks. However, a larger mass of sector 1 firms will opt to incur the menu cost and reset their price as these firms experience larger fluctuations in their nominal marginal costs. Under a price level target, even firms that did not experience any productivity changes, either at the firm- or sector-level, will have to readjust their prices because of changes in the wage that a monetary policy rule ensuring a constant price-level will ensue. Even in a rich, dynamic model, nominal wage targeting is superior to price level targeting: it prevents firms who experienced small or nil productivity shocks from resetting their prices and incurring welfare-diminishing menu costs.

evidence for sign nonlinearities in response to identified monetary shocks; Ascari and Haber (2021) show evidence for size nonlinearities in response to identified monetary shocks.

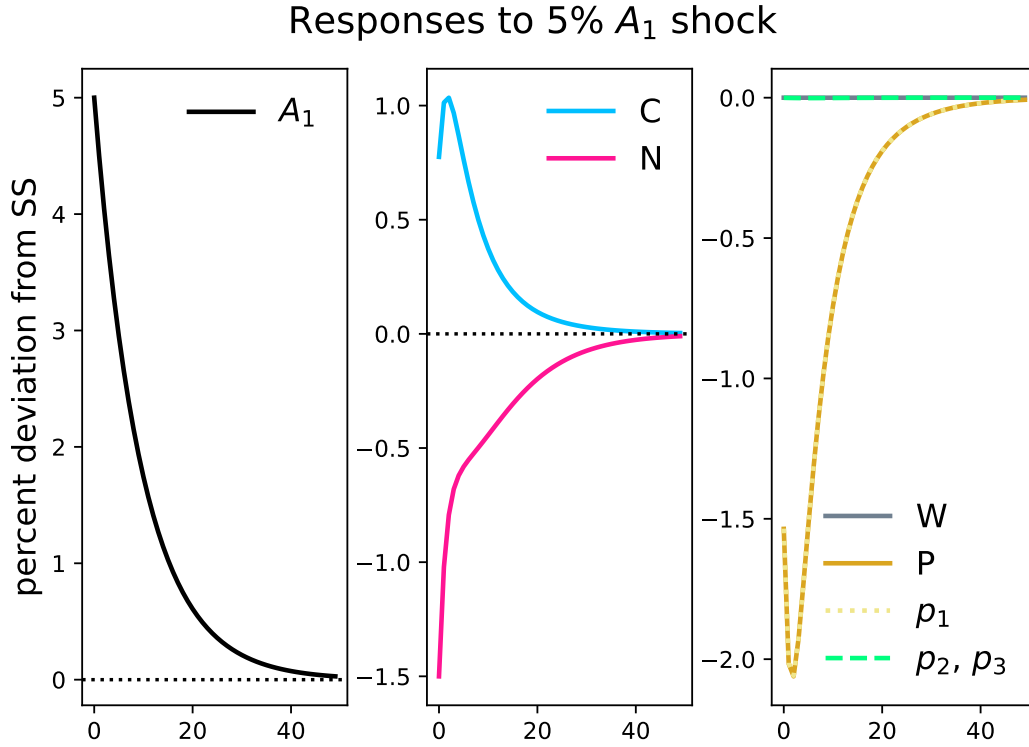


Figure 3: Sector-1 sectoral productivity is increased by a 5% shock which decays at rate ρ^{sect} . Other variables are macroeconomic aggregates under a nominal wage targeting rule: C is consumption, N is labor, P is the price level, and W is nominal wages.

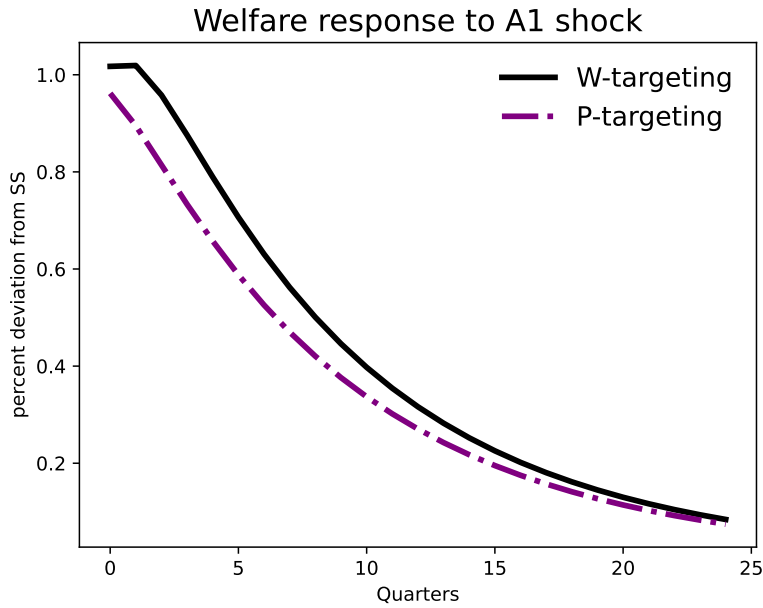


Figure 4: Percent deviation from steady state in welfare after a 1% persistent increase in A_1 under wage (blue) and price level (red) targeting.

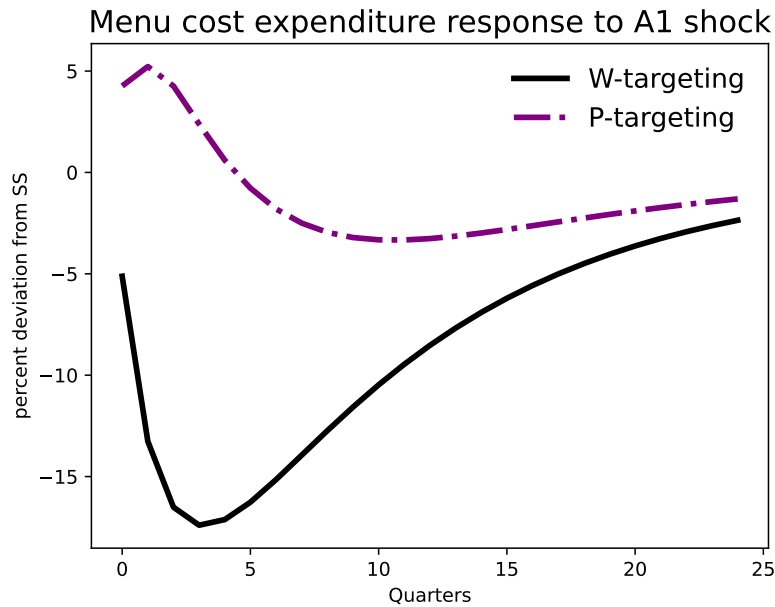


Figure 5: Percent deviation from steady state in labor used on menu costs after a 5% persistent increase in A_1 under wage (blue) and price level (red) targeting.

6.5 Decomposing welfare

6.6 Numerically-optimal policy is well-approximated by wage targeting

In this section, we solve numerically for a welfare-maximizing interest rate rule for monetary policy in response to a set of shocks. We show that, under this optimal policy rule, the volatility of nominal wages is low; and furthermore that the welfare gain of moving from nominal wage targeting to the optimal rule is small.

In progress ...

6.7 Optimal policy comparative statics

In this section, we discuss the parameters that most affect optimal policy. These are: the magnitude of menu costs ψ , the volatility of idiosyncratic shocks σ_{idio} compared to sectoral shocks; and the persistence of the sectoral shock.

In progress ...

7 Conclusion

Summarizing. Consider an economy with S sectors where firms within each sector are subject to sector-specific productivity shocks. As an example, suppose firms in sector 1 are hit by a positive productivity shock. If the shock is sufficiently large, then it is efficient and desirable for firms in this sector to cut their *relative* prices, compared to other firms in other sectors of the economy. Under a policy of constant nominal wages, firms outside of sector 1 have no desire to adjust their prices: firms wish to adjust their prices only if their nominal marginal costs change, and their nominal marginal costs are unchanged because their productivity is unchanged and nominal wages are kept stable. Meanwhile, firms in sector 1 choose to adjust their nominal prices because of the productivity shock. As a result, relative prices between sector-1 firms and other firms are undistorted – because firms in sector 1 updated their prices – and *only* this one sector has incurred wasteful menu costs.

This logic is formalized in our analytical model and explored quantitatively in our computational results. We revisit the question of optimal monetary under sticky prices, using a more realistic microfoundation for sticky prices – menu costs – than the benchmark New Keynesian model. Our analytical approach shows, without linearization, that the textbook prescription for inflation stabilization is not optimal under the more realistic foundation of menu costs. In our quantitative model, the welfare loss from implementing inflation targeting rather than nominal wage targeting is large, due to the sizable estimates in the literature for the empirical magnitude of menu costs.

The conclusion that optimal monetary policy should result in countercyclical inflation (or, “approximate nominal income targeting”) resonates with the results of other studies in the broader optimal monetary policy literature away from sticky prices (Sheedy 2014; Angeletos and La’O 2020; Selgin 1997). Integrating these varied approaches into a unified theory of optimal monetary policy is an open question for future research.

Practical implementation. A full analysis of practical considerations for implementing a policy of nominal wage targeting is beyond the scope of this paper, but we conclude by offering some remarks on the topic.

In practice, what measure should policymakers use to measure nominal wage growth? There are similar issues with measuring inflation...

In practice, what should be done about revisions? There are similar issues with inflation revisions (Audoly et al. 2023)...

Does nominal wage targeting require policymakers to have more knowledge than inflation targeting? At the very least, it very plausibly requires less information than esti-

imating the output gap for a Taylor rule...

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A Additional proofs

A.1 Proof of lemma 1

Proof. Equation (12) showed that a firm j in sector i with inherited price p_i^{old} adjusts if and only if:

$$\left(\frac{W}{A_i}\right)^{1-\eta} p_i^\eta y_i \left[\frac{1}{\eta}\right] - W\psi > \left(p_i^{\text{old}}\right)^{1-\eta} p_i^\eta y_i \left[1 - \frac{W/A_i}{p_i^{\text{old}}} \cdot \frac{\eta-1}{\eta}\right]$$

Define:

$$f(W, A_i) \equiv \left(\frac{W}{A_i}\right)^{1-\eta} p_i^\eta y_i \left[\frac{1}{\eta}\right] - W\psi - \left(p_i^{\text{old}}\right)^{1-\eta} p_i^\eta y_i \left[1 - \frac{W/A_i}{p_i^{\text{old}}} \cdot \frac{\eta-1}{\eta}\right] \quad (41)$$

The firm will adjust iff $f(W, A_i) \geq 0$.

Observe first that for the locus of (W, A_i) such that $W/A_i = p_i^{\text{old}}$, it is the case that $f(W, A_i) = -W\psi < 0$ and the firm will not adjust. That is, this locus is a subset of the inaction region $\Lambda \equiv \{(W, A_i) | f(W, A_i) < 0\}$. Thus Λ is nonempty.

In A_i space. Observe that

$$\frac{\partial f}{\partial A_i} = p_i^\eta y_i W (A_i^{-2}) \left(\frac{\eta-1}{\eta}\right) \left[\left(\frac{W}{A_i}\right)^{-\eta} - (p_i^{\text{old}})^{-\eta}\right]$$

This is positive iff $W/A_i < p_i^{\text{old}}$. Additionally, $\lim_{A_i \rightarrow 0} f(\cdot, A_i) = \lim_{A_i \rightarrow \infty} f(\cdot, A_i) = \infty$ and $f(\cdot, A_i)$ is continuous in A_i on $(0, \infty)$.

Now consider any fixed W^0 such that there exists some A_i^0 with $f(W^0, A_i^0) < 0$. Then by the intermediate value theorem there exists an inaction interval $(\underline{\lambda}, \bar{\lambda})$ around W^0 such that $f(W^0, \underline{\lambda}) = f(W^0, \bar{\lambda}) = 0$, and $f(W^0, A_i) < 0$ iff $A_i \in (\underline{\lambda}, \bar{\lambda})$. To see that $\bar{\lambda}$ is increasing in ψ and $\underline{\lambda}$ is decreasing in ψ , observe that increasing ψ shifts the entire $f(x)$ curve down, i.e. $\frac{\partial f}{\partial \psi} < 0$.

If for a fixed W^0 there is no A_i with $f(W, A_i) < 0$, then by construction there is no point in Λ along W^0 .

In W space. Similarly, observe that

$$\frac{\partial f}{\partial W} = p_i^\eta y_i A_i^{-1} \left(\frac{\eta-1}{\eta}\right) \left[(p_i^{\text{old}})^{-\eta} - \left(\frac{W}{A_i}\right)^{-\eta}\right] - \psi$$

This is zeroed for the locus of (W, A_i) such that

$$\left(\frac{W}{A_i}\right)^{-\eta} = (p_i^{\text{old}})^{-\eta} - \psi p_i^{-\eta} y_i^{-1} A_i \left(\frac{\eta - 1}{\eta}\right)^{-1} \equiv \zeta^{-\eta}$$

Observe that $f_1 < 0$ iff $W/A_i < \zeta$. Additionally, $\lim_{W \rightarrow 0} f(W, \cdot) = \infty$.³⁰ Additionally, $f(W, \cdot)$ is continuous in W on $(0, \infty)$. Thus, as above, consider any fixed A_i^0 such that there exists some W^0 with $f(W^0, A_i^0) < 0$. By the intermediate value theorem there exists (abusing notation) an inaction interval $(\underline{\lambda}, \bar{\lambda})$ around A_i^0 such that $f(\underline{\lambda}, A_i^0) = f(\bar{\lambda}, A_i^0) = 0$, and $f(W, A_i^0) < 0$ iff $W \in (\underline{\lambda}, \bar{\lambda})$, where $\bar{\lambda}$ is potentially infinite. To see that $\bar{\lambda}$ is increasing in ψ and $\underline{\lambda}$ is decreasing in ψ , observe that increasing ψ shifts the entire $f(x)$ curve down, i.e. $\frac{\partial f}{\partial \psi} < 0$. \square

³⁰The second limit comes from using L'Hopital's rule, together with the natural parameter restriction that $\psi < \frac{1}{s\eta}$. Without this maximum bound on ψ , firms would *always* earn negative profits after adjusting – i.e., firms would *never* adjust.

A.2 Formal statement of planner's problem

Recall we derived that equilibrium welfare in each of the four regimes as a (potentially constant) function of the social planner's choice of the money supply:

$$\begin{aligned}
W_{\text{all adjust}} &= \ln \left(\frac{\gamma^{1/S}}{S} \right) - [1 + S\psi] \\
W_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}(M) &= \ln \left(\frac{\gamma^{\frac{1}{S}} M^{\frac{S-1}{S}}}{S} \right) - \left[\frac{1}{S} + (S-1) \frac{M}{S} + \psi \right] \\
W_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}(M) &= \ln \left(\frac{1}{S} M^{1/S} \right) - \left[\frac{S-1}{S} + \frac{1}{S} \frac{M}{S} + \frac{S-1}{S} \psi \right] \\
W_{\text{none adjust}}(M) &= \ln \left(\frac{M}{S} \right) - \left[\frac{1}{\gamma} \frac{M}{S} + (S-1) \frac{M}{S} \right]
\end{aligned}$$

Constrained planner's problem. We define the constrained planner as the planner who chooses M in each regime to maximize welfare, *constrained* by the fact that the choice of M must be incentive compatible with whether various sectors actually adjust or not:

$$\begin{aligned}
M_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^{*, \text{constrained}} &\equiv \arg \max_M W_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}(M) \\
\text{s.t. } f(M, \gamma) &\geq 0 \text{ and } f(M, 1) \leq 0
\end{aligned} \tag{42}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
M_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^{*, \text{constrained}} &\equiv \arg \max_M W_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}(M) \\
\text{s.t. } f(M, \gamma) &\leq 0 \text{ and } f(M, 1) \geq 0
\end{aligned} \tag{43}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
M_{\text{none adjust}}^{*, \text{constrained}} &\equiv \arg \max_M W_{\text{none adjust}}(M) \\
\text{s.t. } f(M, \gamma) &\leq 0 \text{ and } f(M, 1) \leq 0
\end{aligned} \tag{44}$$

where $f(M, A_i)$ refers to the function defined in (29) which is positive if and only if firms in sector i want to adjust. This defines, for example, $M_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^{*, \text{constrained}}$ as the level of money supply which maximizes welfare in equilibrium when only sector 1 adjusts $W_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}(M)$, *subject to the constraint* that it is indeed incentive-compatible for sector-1 firms to adjust, $f(M, \gamma) \geq 0$, and incentive-compatible for firms in sectors k to not adjust, $f(M, 1) \leq 0$. Denote the associated constrained-optimal levels of welfare in each regime as:

$$W_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^{*, \text{constrained}} = W_{\text{only 1 adjusts}} \left(M_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^{*, \text{constrained}} \right)$$

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{W}_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^{*, \text{ constrained}} &= \mathbb{W}_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}} \left(M_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^{*, \text{ constrained}} \right) \\ \mathbb{W}_{\text{none adjust}}^{*, \text{ constrained}} &= \mathbb{W}_{\text{none adjust}} \left(M_{\text{none adjust}}^{*, \text{ constrained}} \right)\end{aligned}$$

The constrained social planner's problem is then to select among these, or to implement the regime where all adjust (in which case the choice of M is irrelevant, as long as it is incentive-compatible):

$$\max \left\{ \mathbb{W}_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^{*, \text{ constrained}}, \mathbb{W}_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^{*, \text{ constrained}}, \mathbb{W}_{\text{none adjust}}^{*, \text{ constrained}}, \mathbb{W}_{\text{all adjust}} \right\} \quad (45)$$

which she implements with the associated incentive-compatible choice for the money supply.

Unconstrained social planner's problem. In the body of the paper and in this subsection, we endow the planner with the instrument of subsidizing menu costs, so that the constraints on (42), (43), and (44) never bind. Because taxation is lump sum and wholly non-distortionary, subsidies to offset the menu cost are equivalent to endowing the planner with the power to change prices directly (but, if doing so, still incurring a menu cost for affected firms). The unconstrained social planner's problem is thus the same as the constrained planner's problem, but without any of the implementability constraints.

$$M_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^* \equiv \arg \max_M \mathbb{W}_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}(M) \quad (46)$$

$$M_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^* \equiv \arg \max_M \mathbb{W}_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}(M) \quad (47)$$

$$M_{\text{none adjust}}^* \equiv \arg \max_M \mathbb{W}_{\text{none adjust}}(M) \quad (48)$$

Since the objective functions in all of these arg maxes are strictly concave, the solution is found from the first order condition, as presented in the text. We denoted the associated unconstrained-optimal levels of welfare in each regime in equations (19), (20), (21) as:

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{W}_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^* &= \mathbb{W}_{\text{only 1 adjusts}} \left(M_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^* \right) \\ \mathbb{W}_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^* &= \mathbb{W}_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}} \left(M_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^* \right) \\ \mathbb{W}_{\text{none adjust}}^* &= \mathbb{W}_{\text{none adjust}} \left(M_{\text{none adjust}}^* \right)\end{aligned}$$

The constrained social planner's problem is then to select among these, or to imple-

ment the regime where all adjust (in which case the choice of M is irrelevant):

$$\max \left\{ \mathbb{W}_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^*, \mathbb{W}_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^*, \mathbb{W}_{\text{none adjust}}^*, \mathbb{W}_{\text{all adjust}} \right\} \quad (49)$$

It is this maximization problem that produces lemma ?? and lemma 3, which in turn produce proposition 1. \square

B Adjustment externalities

In this section, we work with a slightly modified version of the baseline model, where menu costs are modeled as a utility penalty rather than as a labor cost. This highlights the way in which the results do not depend on how menu costs are modeled, and also facilitates an analysis of the role of adjustment externalities.

B.1 Model setup

The final goods producer and sectoral goods producer are exactly the same as the baseline model.

Intermediate goods producers. The intermediate goods producers again are a unit mass of monopolistically competitive firms in each sector with linear technology and productivity that is common to the sector. They again face a menu cost if adjusting prices. Here, unlike the baseline model, the adjustment cost is not ψ units of extra labor, but a penalty $(1 - \psi)$ that scales down the firm manager's objective function (but not profits). Firm i in sector j faces the following maximization program:

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{p_i(j)} & D_i(j) (1 - \psi \chi_i(j)) \\ \text{s.t. } & D_i(j) = p_i(j) y_i(j) - W n_i(j) (1 - \tau) \\ & \chi_i(j) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } p_i(j) \neq p_i^{\text{old}} \\ 0 & \text{else} \end{cases} \\ & y_i(j) = y_i \left(\frac{p_i(j)}{p_i} \right)^{-\eta} \\ & y_i(j) = A_i n_i(j) \end{aligned}$$

This menu cost is a utility penalty that is passed on to households, but does not affect physical profits. As before, all firms within a sector face the same problem, and we drop the (j) notation when the context is clear.

Households. The representative household is precisely as in the baseline model, except that the utility function (1) is modified to be:

$$\mathbb{W} = \ln C - N + \ln \left(\frac{M}{P} \right) - \psi \sum_i \chi_i$$

The household has the same preferences over consumption, labor, and real balances; but now is directly penalized in terms of welfare when firms adjust prices. The benefit of this modeling technique is that it turns off the income effects caused by menu costs, as discussed in section 5.1, and is a technique that has been used by e.g. Auclert, Rognlie and Straub (2018) or Guerrieri et al. (2021).

B.2 Shock and equilibrium

We run the same exercise, shocking the productivity of sector 1 from $A_1 = 1$ to $A_1 = \gamma > 1$. The equilibrium allocations in the four regimes 3.1 is *exactly* the same as in the body of the paper, except that the level of aggregate labor in each of the four regimes is no longer affected by menu costs. The equilibrium level of welfare in each of the four regimes as a function of the choice of money supply is:

$$\begin{aligned} W_{\text{flex}} &= \ln \left(\frac{\gamma^{1/S}}{S} \right) - 1 \\ W_{\text{all adjust}} &= \ln \left(\frac{\gamma^{1/S}}{S} \right) - 1 \\ W_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}(M) &= \ln \left(\frac{\gamma^{1/S}}{S} M^{\frac{S-1}{S}} \right) - \frac{1}{S} [1 + M(S-1)] - \psi \\ W_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}(M) &= \ln \left(\frac{1}{S} M^{\frac{1}{S}} \right) - \frac{1}{S} \left[S - 1 + \frac{M}{\gamma} \right] - (S-1)\psi \\ W_{\text{none adjust}}(M) &= \ln \left(\frac{M}{S} \right) - \frac{M}{S} \left[S - 1 + \frac{1}{\gamma} \right] \end{aligned}$$

B.3 Adjustment decision

The firm compares its objective function under price adjustment versus under the inherited price. The adjustment condition can be simplified to be written as: adjust if and only if

$$\frac{1}{\eta}(1 - \psi) > \left[\frac{W/A_i}{p_i^{\text{old}}} \right]^\eta \left(\left[\frac{W/A_i}{p_i^{\text{old}}} \right]^{-1} - \frac{\eta - 1}{\eta} \right)$$

For additional analytical tractability, we make the following assumption in this section:

Assumption 1. The elasticity of substitution is $\eta = 2$.

This assumption allows for a closed form solution to the inaction region, using the quadratic formula: do not adjust if and only if

$$\frac{W}{A_i} \in \left(p_i^{\text{old}}(1 - \sqrt{\psi}), p_i^{\text{old}}(1 + \sqrt{\psi}) \right) \quad (50)$$

Clearly this has the same properties as the Λ inaction region described in lemma 1.

When starting from the steady state where p_i^{old} for all sectors i , and using the equilibrium $W = M$ condition, then we have the following. The inaction region for sector 1 is

$$M \in (\gamma(1 - \sqrt{\psi}), \gamma(1 + \sqrt{\psi}))$$

The inaction region for sectors k is

$$M \in (1 - \sqrt{\psi}, 1 + \sqrt{\psi})$$

B.4 The planner's problem

The planner's problem – importantly, without the ability to subsidize menu costs and so denoted “constrained” – written in full is:

$$\begin{aligned} & \max_{\substack{\text{all adjust, only 1 adjusts} \\ \text{only } k \text{ adjust, none adjust}}} \left\{ \mathbb{W}_{\text{all adjust}}, \mathbb{W}_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^*, \mathbb{W}_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^*, \mathbb{W}_{\text{none adjust}}^* \right\} \quad (51) \\ & \text{s.t.} \\ & \mathbb{W}_{\text{all adjust}} = \left\{ \ln \left(\frac{\gamma^{1/S}}{S} \right) - 1 \right\} \\ & \mathbb{W}_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^* = \left\{ \begin{aligned} & \max_M \ln \left(\frac{\gamma^{1/S}}{S} M^{\frac{S-1}{S}} \right) - \frac{1}{S} [1 + M(S-1)] - \psi \\ & \text{s.t. } M \in (1 - \sqrt{\psi}, 1 + \sqrt{\psi}) \\ & \quad M \notin (\gamma(1 - \sqrt{\psi}), \gamma(1 + \sqrt{\psi})) \end{aligned} \right\} \\ & \mathbb{W}_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^* = \left\{ \begin{aligned} & \max_M \ln \left(\frac{1}{S} M^{\frac{1}{S}} \right) - \frac{1}{S} \left[S - 1 + \frac{M}{\gamma} \right] - (S-1)\psi \\ & \text{s.t. } M \notin (1 - \sqrt{\psi}, 1 + \sqrt{\psi}) \\ & \quad M \in (\gamma(1 - \sqrt{\psi}), \gamma(1 + \sqrt{\psi})) \end{aligned} \right\} \\ & \mathbb{W}_{\text{none adjust}}^* = \left\{ \begin{aligned} & \max_M \ln \left(\frac{M}{S} \right) - \frac{M}{S} \left[S - 1 + \frac{1}{\gamma} \right] \\ & \text{s.t. } M \in (1 - \sqrt{\psi}, 1 + \sqrt{\psi}) \\ & \quad M \in (\gamma(1 - \sqrt{\psi}), \gamma(1 + \sqrt{\psi})) \end{aligned} \right\} \end{aligned}$$

B.5 Interior optima

The interior optima for each regime, found from the first order conditions, are the same as the baseline model:

$$\begin{aligned} M_{\text{only 1 adjusts}}^{\text{interior}} &= 1 \\ M_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^{\text{interior}} &= \gamma \\ M_{\text{none adjust}}^{\text{interior}} &= \frac{S}{S - 1 + 1/\gamma} \end{aligned}$$

B.6 Only sector 1 adjusts: The possibility of *positive* adjustment externalities

Suppose the unconstrained social planner – i.e., one who could subsidize menu costs and ignore the implementability constraints – would want to implement the regime where only sector 1 adjusts, and she therefore wants to set $M = 1$. We now examine whether this is incentive compatible: does it result in sector- k firms being within their inaction region and sector-1 firms being outside it?

First observe that $M = 1$ indeed ensures that sector- k firms are in their inaction region, since $M = 1 \in (1 - \sqrt{\psi}, 1 + \sqrt{\psi})$ always.

However, it is possible that $M = 1$ could leave sector-1 firms inside their inaction region, if the following condition holds:

$$\gamma < \frac{1}{1 - \sqrt{\psi}} \equiv \gamma_1 \quad (52)$$

As an existence proof, it is possible to come up with numerical examples for parameters satisfying the above where it would be, in fact, socially optimal to implement this regime if there were no implementability constraints. When this is the case, then the best the central bank can do within this regime is to set $M = \gamma(1 - \sqrt{\psi})$. This is a case of *positive* adjustment externalities: the social planner would prefer that sector 1 adjusts its prices, even though it is individually rational to not do so.

B.7 No sectors adjust: The possibility of *negative* adjustment externalities

Now suppose the unconstrained social planner would prefer that no sector adjusts (i.e. $\gamma < \bar{\gamma}$). The interior optimum level of the money supply, as previously noted, would

be $M_{\text{none adjust}}^{\text{interior}} = \frac{S}{S-1+1/\gamma}$. Is this incentive-compatible?

To be incentive-compatible requires that both $\frac{S}{S-1+1/\gamma} > \gamma(1 - \sqrt{\psi})$ and $\frac{S}{S-1+1/\gamma} < 1 + \sqrt{\psi}$. Thus, there is a *negative* adjustment externality – where its privately optimal for firms in a sector to adjust even when its not socially optimal to do so – if either:

$$\gamma < \frac{1 + \frac{1}{S-1}\sqrt{\psi}}{1 - \sqrt{\psi}} \equiv \gamma_2 \quad (53)$$

or

$$\gamma > \frac{1 + \sqrt{\psi}}{S - (S-1)(1 + \sqrt{\psi})} \equiv \gamma_3 \quad (54)$$

As an existence proof, it is possible to come up with numerical examples for parameters satisfying either of the above where it would be, in fact, socially optimal to implement this regime if there were no implementability constraints. When this is the case, then the best the central bank can do within this regime is to set M at the respective boundary.

B.8 Summarizing the possibilities for welfare

A similar analysis the above can be done for the case when only sectors k adjust, where a constraint will bind if $\gamma > \gamma_4 \equiv 1 + \sqrt{\psi}$. We summarize the results from above and this additional case in the following:

$$\mathbb{W}_{\text{all adjust}} = \mathbb{W}_{\text{flex}} - S\psi$$

$$\mathbb{W}_{\text{only 1 adjust}}^{*,\text{constrained}} = \begin{cases} \mathbb{W}_{\text{flex}} - \psi & \text{if } \gamma \geq \gamma_1 \\ \ln\left(\frac{\gamma^{1/S}}{S}\gamma_1^{\frac{S-1}{S}}\right) - \frac{1}{S}[1 + \gamma_1(S-1)] - \psi & \text{else} \end{cases}$$

$$\mathbb{W}_{\text{only } k \text{ adjust}}^{*,\text{constrained}} = \begin{cases} \mathbb{W}_{\text{flex}} - (S-1)\psi & \text{if } \gamma \leq \gamma_4 \\ \ln\left(\frac{1}{S}\gamma_4^{1/S}\right) - \frac{1}{S}\left[S-1 + \frac{\gamma_4}{\gamma}\right] - (S-1)\psi & \text{else} \end{cases}$$

$$\mathbb{W}_{\text{none adjust}}^{*,\text{constrained}} = \begin{cases} -\log[S-1+1/\gamma] - 1 & \text{if } \gamma \in [\gamma_3, \gamma_2] \\ \ln\left(\frac{\gamma_2}{S}\right) - \frac{\gamma_2}{S}\left[S-1 + \frac{1}{\gamma}\right] & \text{if } \gamma > \gamma_2 \\ \ln\left(\frac{\gamma_3}{S}\right) - \frac{\gamma_3}{S}\left[S-1 + \frac{1}{\gamma}\right] & \text{if } \gamma < \gamma_3 \end{cases}$$

Optimal monetary policy considers which of these achieves the highest welfare, and

sets the money supply M to implement.

C A multisector Rotemberg model

To be written up.

D Computational appendix

To be written up.